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STRANGE FATHLEEN



With the West in Her Eyes



With the West in Her Eyes

THE STORY OF A MODERN PIONEER

KATHLEEN STRANGE

" . . . Where there passes a woman with
the West in her eyes,
Or a man with his back to the East."

SARA COLERIDGE

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To Farm Women — Pioneers All





Foreword

Many times, when I first contemplated setting down my experiences, contained in a period of over ten years spent on a Western Canadian prairie farm, I was halted by the realization that a large number of inspiring and informative books had already been written about pioneering days by men and women whose names will go down in history as being the true founders of the West.

What a story those early pioneers had to tell!

The first bachelor homesteaders had come out, most of them, with nothing more substantial than courage and optimism with which to battle against the harsh elements of a new country and a new life. The early women settlers, those brave spirits who dared to venture forth with their men, had endured unspeakable toil and loneliness. Yet, both men and women alike had displayed the most amazing fortitude at all times and had finally succeeded in laying the foundations of a national rural life that has attracted, and still continues to attract, thousands of people from all parts of the world.

I realized, all too well, that I could not claim to be a

member of that illustrious company of early pioneers. I had come to Canada in a day when the vast, unfenced plains of the West had already been broken up into the comparative intimacy of small farmsteads; when the slow-moving oxen had long since disappeared and time and labour-saving horses and tractors toiled upon the land in their stead; when the old log and sod houses were being rapidly supplanted, in many instances, by pretentious frame dwellings; when railways crisscrossed a country where only rough wagon trails had existed before; and when good roads and transportation facilities had become common to practically all.

Yes, the story of the early days in Western Canada had been told many times, and well told. But, so far as I knew, no one had ever told the story of the modern pioneers—more particularly the story of the men and women who came to the West within the last decade or so from comfortable homes in big cities, to face, not the physical hardships and isolation of former years but a strange and unfamiliar set of circumstances, none the less trying and psychologically difficult to them, in comparison, as were the early trials and tribulations of their predecessors.

Looking back, however, I realized that there were highlights in our own ten years of farming that appeared to stand out as definite achievements—achievements that might prove a source of inspiration and encouragement to others.

There was the fact, for example, that within three years

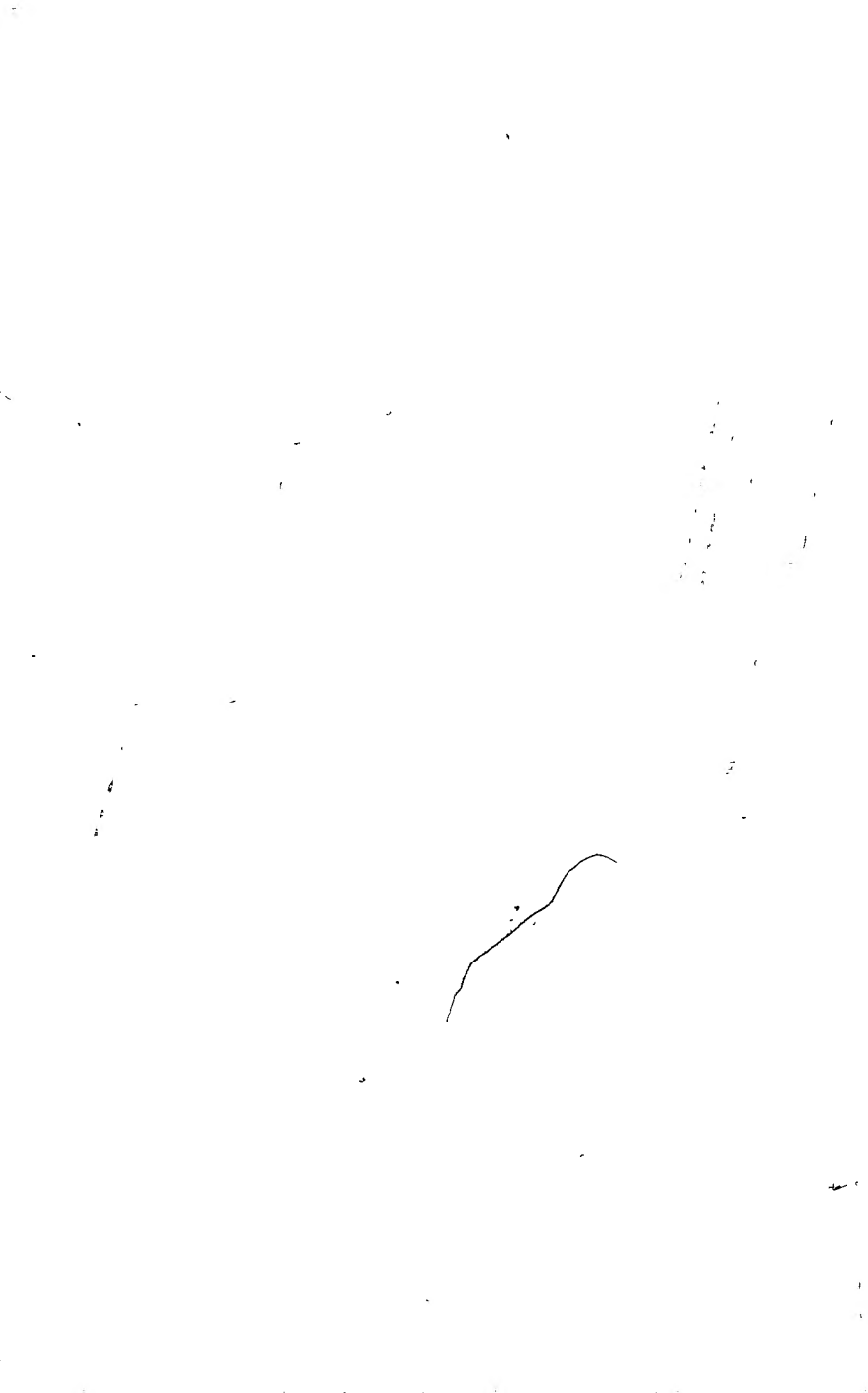


of our coming to the West, without any previous experience of farming, or indeed any initial liking for it, my husband and I had earned the distinction of winning the World's Wheat Championship at the Chicago International Grain Exposition; that in addition to the three hundred odd acres already in cultivation, we had broken up some three hundred more of virgin sod, and kept them all free from weeds for over ten years—no mean accomplishment; that within those same ten years we had built up a seed farm and a reputation for producing good seed that had made us known from one end of agricultural Canada to another; and that today my husband is recognized as one of the leading agriculturists in this country and, although not at the moment living and working on a farm, is still eagerly sought for advice and help in all matters relating to rural life.

It seemed to me, then, that the fears and hopes, the setbacks and triumphs, the tragedies and comedies, as well as the actual physical endeavours that went towards making up those ten eventful years, should constitute a story in themselves—a story of both physical and psychological development that is worthy of record.

K. R. S.

Winnipeg, Canada.





With the West in Her Eyes





One

On a stifflingly hot day of July, in the year 1920, I alighted with my family from a branch-line train of the Canadian National Railway at a little flag-station in Central Alberta.

Fenn was the name that appeared on our tickets. And this was Fenn! Not a town, as we had expected, nor even a small village; merely an unattractive, obscure little depot, at which the train stopped only when deliberately flagged by an intending passenger, or when some one on it wanted to alight. It was in the centre of a vast farming country, the like of which we had never seen before. The nearest cities were Edmonton and Calgary, both of them some one hundred and fifty miles to the north and south respectively. Fenn, too, was five miles from our ultimate destination—the thousand-acre farm which my husband had recently chosen, and on which he hoped to win back good health and make for his family a permanent home.

A Western Canadian farm!

Of all places it was the last to which I had ever ex-

pected to come. Indeed, if any one had suggested, when I was first married, the possibility of my going to live on a farm of any sort, I should have laughed and probably have exclaimed:

"No power on earth would make *me* go on a farm. Farming! Why, the very *word* is anathema to me. The mere thought of such a life is intolerable."

I had been born in London and brought up there. So had my husband. Neither of us had had any experience in farming or of country life, either at home or abroad. My husband, in fact, was an engineer by profession, having served his apprenticeship, as a boy, with the well-known firm of Armstrong Whitworths in Manchester. His life thereafter had been an exciting and adventurous one. He had gone to South Africa with the British Forces during the Boer War. Then he had spent a few years in the Klondike, gold-mining. From the Klondike he had travelled on to China, Japan and Australia. On his way back from Australia across the Pacific, he had stopped off in Hawaii. There he had found an anchorage that lasted for over twelve years.

When the World War broke out in 1914, Harry Strange held a position of responsibility as general manager of a large Honolulu company. He had lost his wife, and his three small sons were being cared for by his mother, Emma Strange, who had come out from England to assume their charge. His future was assured. He had a wide circle of friends. In addition, he was well over military age and was thousands of miles away from the

scene of conflict. What need for him to throw up a peaceful, sheltered existence, almost at the other side of the world, merely for the sake of an Idea? So he might have argued. But the course he actually followed was to pay his own way to England and, without either introduction or "pull," go straight to the British War Office and secure a commission in a Special Brigade of the Corps of Royal Engineers. By the end of two weeks he was over in France, where he was immediately assigned to a special company putting over flame and poison gas.

Harry had been wounded shortly before I met him, in 1917, and was doing "light duty" for a few weeks on leave at the Ministry of Munitions. I myself was working there at the time, although in a different department. I had left school at the outbreak of the War and gone into the business world, very quickly becoming associated with one and another of the various War Departments. Thus, at a comparatively early age, I had learned to stand on my own feet and fight my own battles. I had encountered men and competed with them on an equal footing and had gained an experience of life that has undoubtedly stood me in good stead during the years that have passed.

Harry and I had become acquainted over a tea-table in the big restaurant of the Metropole Hotel, on Northumberland Avenue, to which practically every member of the Ministry staff would resort each afternoon around four o'clock. I was seated at a table with a group of fel-

low workers when he entered the room. There was a single empty chair beside me. He took it.

We began talking, casually. Soon we were engrossed in an absorbing conversation. We found that we had many tastes and interests in common. We were drawn to each other from the very start.

Harry, I must confess, was actually the antithesis of all my youthful dreams. Here was a man who was neither young nor good-looking nor rich; who had already been married and had three children; and who proposed, at the end of the war, to return to a country so far away that it sounded almost mythical. Yet almost overnight he swept me completely off my feet, so that all the circumstances that might have seemed insurmountable, suddenly mattered not at all.

This slight, dark man, with the kindly blue eyes and wide, generous mouth, so captivated my imagination and my heart that within a few months of our first meeting we were engaged.

We originally planned to be married in the summer of 1918. English leave was rather difficult to get at that time, so Harry arranged for me to go over to Paris for our marriage at the British Embassy there. Circumstances arose that prevented my travelling to France, so we waited and later chose November 11th as our prospective wedding day. Harry would, he felt sure, be able to come home by then. He told me to have everything in readiness for a quick and simple wedding on that day.

Shortly before the chosen date I went out and pur-

chased a special licence and a wedding ring. It is amusing to recollect, at this late date—more than eighteen years afterward—that I have not yet been repaid for these two disbursements.

The dramatic signing of the Armistice, at eleven o'clock on the morning of November 11th, of course completely disrupted our plans. All leaves were immediately cancelled, and our wedding had to be postponed once more.

I spent what should have been my wedding day riding around London in an American motor truck, shouting and singing with the rest of a joy-crazed nation. Who cared if one's own petty plans had been upset now that peace had at last come to a war-weary world! How our hearts sang with thankfulness and relief. Never, I am sure, will people know deeper joy and greater thanksgiving again.

Although our wedding actually took place some six weeks after the signing of the Armistice—on December 23, 1918, to be exact—I have always considered it a war wedding.

The British Government was repatriating, free of cost, all British officers, and their wives and families, who had paid their own fares from homes in countries other than the British Empire to come over and join the British Forces. Naturally we had to await their convenience for leaving England. We finally sailed from Liverpool on June 14, 1919, our destination being Hawaii.

The voyage and the railway journey across America were without particular adventure. It was shortly after

our arrival in San Francisco, and while waiting for a ship to take us to Hawaii, that Harry began to complain of not feeling well. Finally he decided to see a doctor.

To our consternation the doctor pronounced him, as a result of his war injuries and strain, "only fifty per cent fit," and strongly recommended, if he wanted to enjoy good health in the future, that he should not return to a sedentary life in a hot climate but should take up some form of outdoor life, preferably farming, in a more bracing climate than that of Hawaii.

His parting words were: "Go on a farm, my friend. Go farming!"

Almost overnight we changed our plans. We decided to stay in California and try to find a farm there.

Our search for a farm, however, did not meet with very satisfactory results. Many of the properties we visited were of the most magnificent proportions. Scenically, too, they were almost perfect. But in almost every instance the price demanded was way beyond the resources at our disposal.

At last we decided to look farther afield, in a less-settled country where we might possibly find something that promised a decent livelihood without too great an initial investment.

During the course of our visits to California farms we had continually heard of the great superiority of "northern-grown stocks." It appeared that the finest stocks of both grain and animals came from the north—from such states as Washington and Oregon, and from

Canada. Canada! Our thoughts were slowly but surely turned towards her.

It was Alberta that finally interested us most of all. In Alberta, we discovered, there were more than a million acres of agricultural land, much of it never having been ploughed. Although the south was said to be level and dry, many interesting irrigation projects had been put into operation there that offered the possibility of investigation. Farther north, in what was known as the "park" country, there was plenty of land to be had more cheaply, land that was blessed with a rich, fertile soil; that was slightly rolling and partly wooded, and well-watered by lakes and rivers. We were assured that during the early summer months there was usually sufficient rainfall in this area to make the grain grow vigorously, and the long, warm summer days helped to ripen it properly, despite the comparative shortness of the growing season.

My husband's investigations were finally narrowed down to a district where he discovered that the percentage of mortgages that had been foreclosed was smaller than anywhere else. This was the district of Fenn. Fortunately a farm was for sale there.

When everything was settled we sent for my mother-in-law and the boys. Naturally I was very excited at the prospect of meeting them. My mother-in-law was a tall, finely-preserved woman, then in late middle age, extraordinarily handsome and competent-looking, and with a genuinely warm greeting for the youthful daughter-in-law who had usurped her place in her son's life. The

boys were handsome, brown-eyed, brown-skinned little fellows—Robert, aged ten, Frederick, eight and Harry, seven. Freddie, particularly, drew one's affections, since he was a delicate, fragile-looking child, and one who seemed, even then, hardly to belong to this world. My husband had already warned me that he was what is known as a "blue" baby. At his birth something had gone wrong with one of the valves of his heart, so that it did not function properly. I had to face the fact that the little boy's days were numbered. I noticed at once that his lips were a peculiar shade of blue and that the tips of his slightly splayed fingers bore the same unnatural tinge. He was bright and intelligent, however, and very little undersized for his age.

We all got along very easily right from the start and soon grew to know each other and to like each other very much indeed.

So here we all were, this bright July day of the year 1920, on the threshold not only of a new country, but of a new life. The train dumped us off some twenty feet short of the shallow loading platform and left us to stagger along the gravel track. Off it went, snorting loudly on its way as if glad to be rid of us and contemptuously indifferent to our future fate.

A group of people, waiting near the platform, eyed us curiously as we approached. Word had evidently gone forth that the newcomers would arrive on the noon train and our future neighbours had turned out in full force

to look 'us over, and to pass judgment on us, as well as to extend us a kindly if somewhat inarticulate greeting.

I realize now that we must have appeared to them to be very queer-looking people indeed. I myself, for instance, did not look the part of a farmer's wife in any particular. I was small and none too robust-looking. I was dressed, city fashion, in a tailored suit, and wore a little hat that had seen its inception in Paris. I also wore high-heeled shoes and the filmiest of silk stockings. To make matters worse, I had my hair cut short, and wore it in a straight Dutch bob with heavy "bangs." Short hair had been a fairly general custom in England since early in the war, but it appeared not to have penetrated this particular part of Western Canada at all. For some time after my arrival, to tell the truth, I felt very uncomfortable and conspicuous on this account, and was more than once tempted to "grow it out," so that I would not seem so very different from every one else. However, one by one the younger members of the community began, somewhat daringly I suspect, to follow my example. Eventually, to my own secret relief, even the older women followed suit, and today, of course, short hair is as general a fashion among prairie women as it is elsewhere in the world.

I felt sure I read a measure of suspicion and disapproval on every face I encountered. I am sure, too, that there were many dark prophecies, when our backs were turned, as to our apparent unfitness for farm life. I am equally confident that many of our future neighbours believed then that we would not endure the life very long. Not

only did they *expect* us to fail, but I rather fancy they unconsciously *wanted* us to fail. We were so obviously city products, and we were, also, by way of being interlopers, since we had come into a community that consisted mainly of one large family from a certain part of Ontario, related, if not by ties of blood, by ties of marriage and long association.

I don't blame them at all, of course, but it certainly made our beginning a very difficult one, and I do not suppose that even my best friends in Fenn today realize how heavy was my heart, and how fearful I felt, as I smilingly shook their hands and responded brightly to their polite expressions of greeting.

As we walked up the hill from the station to the store, I took a look around me and was not particularly encouraged by what I saw. Across the railway track were some dingy-looking freight sheds and a high, narrow building, painted bright red, which I later learned was a grain elevator. On the west side of the track was the general store—a white frame building with two wide plate-glass windows and a wooden stairway running up one side. Several buggies and wagons were hitched to posts outside this building, among them a Ford car and an open touring car of somewhat more pretentious make. As we came closer I saw above the doorway of the store the words: FENN GENERAL STORE.

The two plate-glass windows on each side of the door framed an assortment of canned goods and packages of cereals, most of them fly-blown and covered with a

generous layer of dust. We were told that we must meet the store-keeper, so we all proceeded inside.

Inside the store there was a musty odour, dominated by the pungent smell of bacon and leather harness, a quantity of both of which commodities hung suspended from the wooden ceiling. A large iron heating stove, stuffed with old newspapers and other rubbish, adorned the centre of the unswept floor. Counters ran down each side, piled untidily with rolls of cloth and miscellaneous articles of merchandise, none of it very fresh-looking. On the shelves behind them were arranged a varied assortment of canned goods; also jars containing candies, tins of tobacco, and boxes of cigarettes, as well as piles of underwear, overalls, shirts, bedding and other "dry" goods, some of which looked to me as if they had been there for innumerable years. At the far end of the store, in a more or less unlighted corner, was a pay telephone and the post office.

"This is where you will do your shopping," my husband informed me. "The store-keeper tells me he stocks something of everything."

The proprietor of the store then came forward and was introduced to me. He was a thin, blond little man, with a somewhat absent manner, but, I soon discovered, a remarkable faculty for doing business.

One day, some time later, I had occasion to remonstrate with him because his prices were considerably higher than those for the same goods in the small towns near-by.

There was no change of expression on his face as he answered:

"If you can do better elsewhere, ma'am, you'd better go there. These are my prices. Take 'em or leave 'em."

Most of the time, of course, we took them. He was shrewd enough to know that the time usually came when people could not get into town, or when they needed some article badly enough to pay his higher price for it.

"I make people pay," he used to say, "for using my store as a convenience."

Many a time, in the days that followed, I used to watch him wheel his supplies up to his store from the railroad. This was always a sort of ritual with him. He used a dilapidated wheel-barrow. On his head he wore a battered derby, several sizes too small for him. This hat, by the way, remained on his head, inside the store and out, winter and summer alike.

He would start from the bottom of the hill with his loaded barrow. Half way up the hill the hat would invariably fall off and go bouncing away down to the bottom. He would then solemnly set the barrow down, sometimes upsetting his load in the process. Then, with dignified but sometimes rather unsteady gait, he would proceed to recover the cherished head-gear. He would balance it carefully on his head again, reload the barrow, and start off once more. I have actually seen him repeat this performance two or three times in one trip up the hill.

He ran the store, after his own fashion, quite capably, and for some years I did quite a lot of business with him. After he left, the store changed hands several times, and we had some very fine store-keepers indeed. These little

country stores, by the way, had much to compete with—the big department stores in the city, the great mail order houses. But they carried bravely on through good years and bad, extending credit to struggling farmers, helping them when they needed help, and asking what must have been but a bare pittance in return.

“Pleased to meet you, ma’am,” the store-keeper greeted me, that first strange day of our arrival, and he extended a work-gnarled hand across the counter.

“Pleased to meet you!” That had been the refrain of every one’s greeting. But had they really been pleased to meet us, I wondered? Were they going to accept us as neighbours and friends? As one of themselves? How were we going to fit in? What was the future going to bring forth?



Two

The open touring car was now standing outside the store, and in this, my husband informed me, we were going to ride out to the farm. The young man who owned the car—his name was Harold—turned out to be a very personable, well-spoken chap, an expert tractor mechanic and, as I learned later, one of the most sought-after bachelors in the countryside.

We drove westward along a country road, a straight, sandy road worn into two deep furrows by the wheels of innumerable buggies and wagons, winding here and there around luxuriant bluff or brush patches, but always keeping within the straight, even limits of a line of barbed-wire fencing stretched between posts all along the road on both sides. It was crossed, at regular intervals, by other roads running north and south.

The grass between the road and the fence was richly carpeted with wild flowers. Roses grew in abundance and were gorgeously coloured, but we found them to be disappointingly odourless. There were enormous brown-eyed Susans, and a great tangle of purple vetch. Tiger

lilies, of deepest orange, profusely dotted the fields, larger and more luxuriant than we had ever seen them growing wild before.

Here and there a yellow canary fluttered in the long grass or a bluebird flashed a gay splash of azure in the trees. Beady-eyed crows cawed on the fence posts. We were quite startled to see little tow-coloured creatures, slightly larger than rats, darting up out of holes here and there, to sit on their haunches and stare at us impudently before darting off again and disappearing down other holes near-by. These, we were told, were gophers, those prolific and destructive little animals that have been the bane of the prairie farmer's existence ever since he first began planting grain. We even saw a coyote or two, a species of prairie wolf, sleek, vicious-looking creatures, who stood and stared insolently at us when we passed.

"They know we haven't a gun," our driver told us. "They never stand around like that when you have one!"

We seemed to be driving, for the most part, along the northern ridge of a great wide valley, a valley that we were told had its origin in the Arctic Circle and extended clear down into Mexico. It had once been the course of a glacial flow, and now a great many rocks and granite-like boulders were left to mark the place where it had been. Piles of rocks along the roadside bore silent witness to the work of man in clearing the land for farming.

Now and again we passed farmhouses, many of them quite pretentious-looking frame buildings, some of them well-painted and well-cared for.

"Is our house anything like that?" I inquired, nodding towards a particularly attractive-looking, newly painted home close to the roadside.

"Well," my husband admitted, "I have to confess that we haven't any house at all—yet."

"No house!" I exclaimed in horror. "Then what on earth are we going to live in?"

"You'll see," he remarked quietly.

I said no more, but my spirits sank into my shoes.

The sun shone mercilessly down upon us; a few mosquitoes buzzed about our ears, and the dust blew up into a cloud behind the open car. Every little hill we climbed brought us a vista of miles of rolling prairie, stretching away to a seemingly limitless horizon. After England—how vast, how appallingly large those great fields seemed.

All at once our driver exclaimed:

"See, there's the Aunger—I mean—*your* place, over there!"

My heart gave an excited bound as I turned to follow his glance.

In the distance, on the opposite bank of the valley, I could make out a little group of scattered buildings. A dark green mass of trees covered a part of the hillside to the left of them; where they stood, however, the land appeared to be quite bare.

At an intersecting road leading down into the valley, we turned and began to run smoothly downhill. Now we were in the bed of the valley itself. It actually seemed

to be cooler. At the foot of the farther rise we turned in at a gate and proceeded across a rough, well-beaten trail that ran along the edge of a field waving high with grain. We passed through a bewildering succession of more wire gates and then began to ascend a short, steep hill. At the top of this hill the farm buildings stood. Before them the car stopped.

My husband jumped out of the car, held out his hand to me, and cried: "We're home, dear!"

Directly in front of me I saw a small wooden shack, unpainted and decidedly weather-beaten, with a door in the centre and a single plain window at each end, one facing north and the other facing south.

Outside the door was a large, square hole, spanned by a piece of board, across which one had to walk to enter the house. Into this hole had apparently been thrown an accumulation of rubbish. At first it seemed to me to be an extraordinarily unsanitary method of disposing of garbage, but I learned soon afterwards that the hole had been dug with the intention of making a cellar, over which the shack could be pulled. The digging, however, had never been completed and had been discarded altogether when the owner made up his mind to sell out.

Behind the shack was a row of some five or six granaries—the small, portable wooden buildings which are used for threshing grain in the fall. They reminded me of a line of large sentry boxes.

"What are they for?" I asked my husband.

He smiled as he replied:

"Those, my dear, are our bedrooms."

In addition to these rather crude living quarters there was a ramshackle frame building which was used as a chicken house and in front of which a few mongrel-looking hens were busily pecking in the dirt. There was no sign of a barn and the yard itself was cluttered with a collection of somewhat rusty looking farm implements—binders, ploughs, a tractor, and a litter of spare parts—though I did not, at that time, recognize them by their proper names.

Some distance from the shack was a deep well, operated by a three-horse-power gasoline engine. From this well, I soon discovered, every drop of water had to be carried to the kitchen by hand.

Mrs. Aunger, whose husband had owned the farm before us, was waiting at the door of the shack to welcome us, a bonny, blond-haired woman, with a pleasant, smiling face. She came forward and greeted us cordially, inviting us into the home which had been hers during the summer months for the past six years.

Inside the shack everything was immaculately clean and neat. But, oh, to my city eyes, how hopelessly unattractive and different it all seemed!

It is difficult to record one's impressions on an occasion such as this without seeming to criticize unkindly, and thus to hurt, perhaps, some good friend's feelings. But it will surely be understood how difficult it was for me not to feel shocked and repelled at what I saw, particularly as it was in such striking contrast to the pleasant and

congenial surroundings I had always enjoyed in my home in England and even since coming to America.

The walls of the shack were covered with a brown material known as beaver-boarding, which appeared to be somewhat the worse for wear in several places. Nails had been driven in at frequent intervals all around, and on these were hung various articles of clothing belonging to the people on the farm. The floor was covered with a brightly-patterned oilcloth, but there were no rugs. A dining-table, of golden oak, its legs well wired together to keep it from falling apart, stood in the centre of the room. There were a number of hard kitchen chairs and a settee of light oak upholstered in leatherette. On a box near the door stood a small enamel wash-basin, with an unflattering mirror above it, and towels hanging from a nail near-by. On a small shelf was a comb and some articles of shaving tackle. On another table, near the wash-basin, stood a pail of water with a tin dipper bobbing about in it. Some uncurtained shelves in a corner accommodated the crockery and supplies as well as the cooking utensils. And the room was furiously hot by reason of a huge cookstove, which at the moment appeared to be in full blast.

Our predecessors had been in the habit, I learned, of moving into the near-by town of Stettler for the winter months, and had consequently found the shack sufficiently adequate for their simple needs during the working season. I have no doubt but that it had become dear to them, too, since a home, however simple it may be, must be judged chiefly by its associations.

Naturally, with our more extensive family, and since we intended to make the farm our permanent quarters the whole year round, the shack was altogether inadequate except as very temporary shelter, and I thanked heaven that funds were forthcoming for the building of a new house in the near future.

After some more or less disjointed conversation—for we were all feeling very strange—I sought the opportunity to repair to my own granary-bedroom to commence unpacking.

Once there, I confess, I gave way to an outburst of tears. I thought of how by this time we might have been well on our way to Hawaii. How thrilled I had been at the idea of going there in the first place. My husband had painted many glamorous word pictures of the Islands for me. And now he had brought me to this! Disappointment, resentment, and an active dislike of my new home fought together within me. I would be no heroine, swallowing my feelings for the sake of my husband's future. I would tell him just what I thought of the place, and of him for bringing me to it.

When Harry came in, his first words were:

"Well, how do you like it?"

I wanted to blurt out: "I don't like it at all. I think it's horrible!"

But I found I just couldn't hurt the poor man's feelings in that fashion. To my utter amazement I realized suddenly that he himself actually *liked* it. The very manner in which he had beamed on everything, as he had pointed

it out to me, had suggested that. Now I was convinced of it.

So I answered at last, very lamely I fear, but in an effort to let him down as lightly as I could:

"I think I shall like it later on."

He stared at me a trifle anxiously, but I was busy again with my unpacking. After a bit he left me to go out to the fields and for the first time in my life I was glad to be left alone.

Harry and I had a small granary to ourselves, while Grandma Strange and the three boys were quartered in a much larger one that accommodated two double beds. A third granary was used by Harold, and a fourth was being occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Aunger, who had promised to remain on the farm for a few days "to show us the ropes."

I had accomplished very little in the way of unpacking when a bell rang.

"That's the supper bell," my husband explained, poking his head in at the door. "Come along to the shack."

My first farm meal! What an abundant meal it was and how different were the conditions to what I had always been used in the city.

The table was covered with a patterned oilcloth. On it were set, for each person, a plate, knife, fork and spoon, and a cup and saucer. The plate did duty for all courses. There were neither napkins nor glasses.

When we were all seated—there were about ten people in all around the table—Mrs. Aunger set on the food.

There were dishes of fried sliced salt pork, steaming bowls of fried potatoes, corn on the cob, pickles, dishes of fruit, plates piled with freshly baked bread, great slabs of incredibly yellow butter, pitchers of thick cream, and a huge pot of strong black tea, with which the meal was freely washed down.

The boys and Harry ate heartily enough. But Grandma Strange and I, neither of us hungry after the long and tiring trip, and both of us somewhat overcome by the sight of so much rich and unfamiliar food, only made a pretence at eating. We had sense enough, however, to do that, for we knew instinctively that a refusal on our part to eat might easily be misconstrued into the idea that we perhaps fancied ourselves too fine for the simple farm fare. It was a situation from which we both escaped with sighs of relief.

After supper Harry took me to a piece of high land to the west of the house and showed me our domain.

To the north the land flowed gently downward, like a great inclined plane of greens and browns, to the capacious valley below. In this great river bottom, grain fields alternated with pasture land as far as the eye could reach in every direction. Beyond this softly moving sea of deep green shallows, we could catch a glimpse of a good-sized lake—Ewing Lake, so named after one of the earliest settlers in the district, Mr. John Ewing, still alive and hearty to this day after almost fifty years of prairie farming. In dry years, I learned later, all the water would evaporate from Ewing Lake, leaving it a lush hay field,

some ten miles long and five miles wide. At the time of our arrival, however, it was a deep body of clear water, with fine, sandy beaches around it from which one could bathe with safety during the summer months.

At intervals along the northern horizon, on the summit of the low-lying hills that formed the opposite bank of the valley, could be seen the friendly outline of neighbours' houses. The nearest one, however, was a good mile away.

On the high land, where we stood, were fields of grain, mostly wheat my husband explained, some of it just at the point of "heading out." Beyond this were more fields of pasture, well-wooded and well-watered with many small lakes or sloughs.

But for the heavy trees we might have been able to see the Red Deer River, and beyond that the Rockies. The Red Deer River was only five miles away to the west, and we often went there later on. A little farther south than our own district was the place where the famous dinosaur bones are to be found, and one of our farmer friends, we discovered, made quite a good business out of leasing stretches of land along the river to scientists and geological societies for their investigations.

The farm buildings themselves were set on the edge of a deep ravine, or coulee as it was called, and on the farther side my eyes were attracted to a dilapidated-looking group of buildings which I at first took to belong to another farm.

"No, they belong to us," my husband told me. "That

was the site of the original homestead, formerly owned by an early settler who still lives near-by. He tells me that the main trail between Calgary and Edmonton once ran right through this farm. That old house over there was often used as a sort of stopping off place for travellers. He would often come home from a trip, he says, to find a note pinned to the kitchen table, with the words: 'Thanks for the grub and shelter.' Some passing visitor had made himself at home there during his absence. The old house is now occupied by one of our hired men and his family."

When, a little later, I was able to investigate the old log house more closely, I marvelled that any one could endure to live in it at all. It consisted of one large room, which served as both living, eating and sleeping quarters for a family of seven. The floor was half-rotted away in places and it was a wonder that the whole family were not precipitated into the cellar below some time during their tenancy there. The walls were lined with stained brown paper, tearing off in shreds all over, and were covered with a regular pattern of insect marks.

It was in this old log house that I received my first introduction to that horrible insect known familiarly, and almost affectionately, to old-timers as a "mahogany flat"—or, in plain English, a bed-bug. With this odious form of insect life the place was plentifully stocked. After the hired man and his family moved away, the old house stood empty for many years. We could not make use of it for storage purposes, nor could we tear it down and

use the lumber for fuel, so fearful were we of contaminating our own living quarters. Not until nine years later did we finally decide to burn it down and break up the good land that it kept out of use. I confess we suffered many a guilty twinge at thus destroying one of the few remaining landmarks of pioneer days.

That first evening, as my husband and I stood on the hillside and looked over our new home, the sun began to go down. It was really a most beautiful sight. I have never seen sunsets to equal those of our Western prairies.

The entire western sky, and part of the north, was as richly coloured as a Persian rug. Great masses of cloud banked up against the horizon, splashed with deepest crimson fading to palest pink, with darkest purple fading to faintest mauve.

"It is beautiful," I thought to myself, "but it's, oh, so different!" I wondered if I would ever be able to endure it; to settle down.

Harry's voice broke in upon my thoughts.

"There's something rather romantic about building from the ground up, isn't there?" he said. "We're starting off with practically nothing. We'll put up a fine house and good buildings. We'll look after our surroundings as well as our crops. One day we'll have a garden and maybe, right here where we stand, a tennis court. Of course, it will take time and patience and a lot of hard work and fighting. Yes, fighting, for if there is one thing I've already learned about farming, it is that whatever else a man gets out of the land, at least he can be

sure of one thing, and that is a struggle. There's always the challenge to fight. And I love a good fight!"

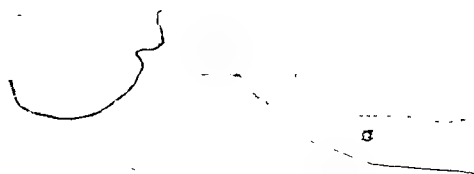
Despite myself I felt my own spirit catching some of his enthusiasm. I'd fight side by side with him in this battle for a home and happiness. It should be a partnership in every sense of the word.

"I'm with you," I said, and we shook hands on it, out there on the fragrant hilltop.

"We'll call the place Fenndale Farm," my husband went on, thoughtfully. "Fenn from the name of the district and dale because of all these little hills and dales that make up our land."

"It's a good name," I agreed. "And what's more, we'll try to make it a well-known and respected one!"

Words spoken in jest, more than anything else, yet destined, in three years, to come true.





Three

How vividly I recall my first day on the farm, and the almost overwhelming realization it brought me of my total lack of knowledge of the kind of life that lay ahead of me. The morning after our arrival, for instance, I awoke to find that it was only a little after five o'clock. To my surprise I found that my husband had already gone out, evidently some time ago, since his place on the hard straw mattress was cold and the door of the granary swung wide to the early summer morning breeze.

In the distance I could hear the lowing of cows and the shouts of a man who was driving them in to be milked. From the chicken house near-by came the cackling of hens and the crowing of a rooster. All of them strange and unfamiliar sounds to me. Evidently it was time for me to get up, too. I dressed quickly and went outside.

What a beautiful morning it was. So fresh and sweet. I looked around and almost had to pinch myself to make sure that what I was seeing was really true. No streets

of houses; no smoke from chimney pots; no rattling street cars or scurrying automobiles. Instead, wide vistas of fields and brush patch; the lake glittering in the distance; the sky overhead so blue that if one had splashed such vivid colour on a canvas it would have been criticized as being unnatural.

I peeked into Grandma Strange's granary. She and the boys still slept. Leaving them undisturbed I walked on. From the shack came the sound of pans clattering and the fragrant smell of coffee. Evidently Mrs. Aunger was up and making breakfast ready.

I walked timidly up to the shack door and poked my head inside. Mrs. Aunger, in an immaculate house-dress, was standing at the stove.

"Want to help?" she asked, cheerfully.

"Yes—yes—certainly, if I can," I faltered.

"You can beat up the pancakes while I finish setting the table," she answered, giving me rather an amused glance.

I stood stupidly by the stove, looking from the bowl of yellow batter to the steaming frying pan in considerable consternation.

"What am I supposed to do?" I asked.

She stared at me incredulously.

"Haven't you ever made pancakes before?"

"Well—no—" I admitted, somewhat shamefacedly.

"I'm afraid I don't know very much about cooking."

"Then you don't know how to bake bread, I suppose," she went on. "You'll have plenty of cooking—of all kinds, you know, if you stay."

If I stayed! But I *had* to stay. I was determined that neither the cooking nor anything else should conquer me. Somehow I'd learn to cook, and to do all the other necessary things, as well.

I'm ashamed to have to make this admission—that I knew nothing about cooking. The fact was that I'd never even boiled an egg or prepared a meal in my life. There was some excuse for me—not very much—but I had gone straight from school into the business world and domestic life had never had any great attraction for me. I had always had some hazy sort of notion that when the time came for me to have a home of my own, cooking and housekeeping would “just come natural.” I soon found out my mistake!

At the crucial moment, that morning, Grandma Strange walked into the room. She was an excellent cook, and right away she took things in hand. Leaving the two women in charge of the shack, I sneaked outside. I wanted to find my husband and tell him how bad I felt about it all.

I found Harry in the barn. He was grooming a horse, as if to the manner born. I could see that he was excited and happy and completely satisfied with the whole situation. Now was certainly not the time to burden him with my complaints.

We walked up to the house together. Breakfast was ready—a really sumptuous meal, three times as large as anything I had ever been used to before, oatmeal, bacon, eggs, potatoes, bread, butter and fruit, to which the men

did full justice. In a little while they were all out again and away on their morning's work.

"You'd better get the boys started at school," Harry said to me. "It's just over the hill there, right on the edge of our own land."

I did not know then how fortunate we were in having the school so close at hand. Many children in the West have to ride or drive, or even walk, anywhere up to five miles to attend school each day, winter and summer alike. I have always pitied these children, especially in winter-time, for it is no unusual occurrence for a child to arrive at school with his lunch frozen almost solid in the lunch pail, his limbs half-perished with cold, and his poor little brain so benumbed that it is quite incapable of properly coping with the problems of school study.

I smile to myself now when I think of the way I dressed the boys up that first day. They wore, I remember, clean linen suits, white socks and white canvas shoes. Their hair was neatly brushed and their faces shone from a thorough application of soap and water.

When we arrived at the school house, I found that the teacher was quite a young girl, still, it appeared, in her teens. Many of the boys were considerably larger than herself, great hulking fellows in their teens also, but she knew how to handle them. I never knew one to get the better of her. She was an excellent teacher, too, and we were all sorry when she left to marry a local farmer.

This leaving to get married was always our greatest trouble with country school teachers. We just couldn't

keep them. Usually they were not only efficient at teaching but were also efficient in the art of getting husbands. Of course, with eligible bachelors simply abounding on every hand, what chance had a healthy, normal-minded young woman of resisting the age-old instinct of exerting her feminine charms in an effort to secure a suitable mate? One could not blame them, even if it did leave us parents, at times, with somewhat of a problem to face.

I remember, a few years later, the problem became so acute that the school trustees called a meeting to see if something couldn't be done about it. "We are running nothing but a free matrimonial bureau," one of them grumbled.

Finally my husband, who by that time had been elected chairman, made a suggestion. It was that one of their number be sent to the Normal School at Camrose and personally select the most homely and unattractive girl that could be found there. Such a young woman, it was reasonably hoped, might be expected to keep the young men at bay for several years.

My husband himself was chosen to go to Camrose. There he was confronted with such a galaxy of beauty and charm that he found it quite impossible to carry out his mission. He compromised by ignoring looks altogether and selecting one of the most talented students—a girl from our own district, as a matter of fact—who promised him that she would not get married for at least six months. She kept her promise faithfully. She got married the day after the six months were up.

The school house, as I have said, was on a corner of our own land. What a time we had, when the men were working down in that vicinity, to keep them away from the school. It was surprising how long it took them to clean up the work that lay nearest to the school yard. What unquenchable thirsts consumed them during the day—thirsts that could only be assuaged by frequent visits to the school pump.

I discovered, also, that the school teacher was a very important personage in the community. It was considered a great honour to be able to board her, and her visits were always the occasion for pleasure and pride. For years I was besieged with requests from the men to "board the teacher." I have often wondered, if I had done so, if any work at all would have been done in our largely male household.

The teacher had a considerable influence in the community for good, not only among the children but among the older people also. It was said recently by a prominent Canadian writer that the real story of the country school teacher in Western Canada is one to which full justice has never yet been done, for it is a story that would tell of the struggles of one man, or one woman, who endeavours to handle the work of eight or nine grades single-handed; who has to direct and mould the characters, as well as the education, of children of many different nationalities, religions and types; who must conduct a fight, not only against the physical hardships occasioned by a climate of intense extremes of heat and

cold, but often also against what has been termed "a measure of intellectual sparseness and social barrenness" little dreamed of by the average city dweller.

And here I should like to mention another problem, connected with education, that before long confronted us. When the children reached the ninth grade, which was the highest they could go at the country school, what was to become of them? Either they must leave school altogether and commence to work for their living, or the parents must find ways and means of sending them to high school in some near-by town.

There are, of course, some excellent boarding schools in our Western cities, to which farm parents can send their sons and daughters. But few farmers can afford to do this. The best they can do usually is to send them into the nearest small town, board them with strangers, and let them attend the day school there. I found out later, from my own experience with Harry and Robert, that this is often a disastrous procedure, so far as their progress and training are concerned. The lack of parental supervision and discipline, and atmosphere of home, and the lure of town life with its facilities for amusements, often proves too much for a young girl or lad, and they end up unsuccessfully.

I have often advocated an adequate boarding system in all country towns in conjunction with the high schools already existing there, whereby the children might be given proper dormitory accommodation, good substantial meals, and careful supervision—all of it at cost.

Some towns have this, I understand, and others are contemplating doing it. The more the better.

Some people have submitted that a high school education is not essential to a farm boy's progress and success in life; that the country child gets his lessons in nature's own school and that should be enough for him. All of which is true to a certain degree. Education, after all, is a very big question in itself. One is prompted to ask: "What exactly is education?" It is defined as the art of developing and cultivating the various physical, intellectual, aesthetic and moral faculties, and perhaps it is not essential that a child should attend high school and college to attain these several ends. Yet one feels that a solid foundation of secondary education behind a really ambitious boy or girl is not to be discounted. I have heard many country people remark bitterly:

"If I had only gone to high school, maybe I shouldn't be working for wages now."

Perhaps they are better off, working for wages. Perhaps not. There is nothing quite so tragic as thwarted ambition.

From my own experience I believe that a country boy and girl should stand an equal chance with a city boy and girl. Much of the backbone of our national character is to be found among the farm people of the West; it surely is only just and right that they should receive every encouragement and assistance in going ahead.



Four

When I returned to the shack, after taking the boys to school, I found Grandma Strange in the middle of a lesson in bread making. I stood by and watched. It looked easy enough. The dough was being punched down in a great bowl—it happened to be the dishpan—on a box outside the shack door. It was so hot that day that there was little danger of the dough “falling” through a chill of any sort. Then it was set at the back of the stove to rise again. In the afternoon it would be shaped into loaves, left to rise once more, and then baked.

It was time, Mrs. Aunger said, to begin preparations for dinner. I offered to peel the potatoes. That was one thing I thought I could safely undertake. But I found that my hands were inexpert at even this simple task. I know that an economical housewife would have chided me severely for the thickness of the skin I hacked off. Fortunately potatoes were plentiful that year and cheap. Nothing was said to me, then. I learned, by bitter experience, to be more careful.

For dinner we had fried salt pork, fried potatoes and

corn on the cob. The new bread was not yet ready, so we had baking-powder biscuits, and for dessert, lemon pies and cake. All of it was washed down, as usual, with good strong tea.

The boys had taken their lunch to school, so did not appear.

During the afternoon I busied myself unpacking and setting my granary to rights. Grandma disappeared for a nap. The men had returned to the fields. A hush seemed to have descended on the lively little world of our dwelling quarters.

But not for long. A few minutes after four I heard the boys whooping outside. I went out to ask them how they had got along at school. What a sight met my eyes! Their suits were liberally plastered with dirt and were sadly ripped in several places. And, in addition, they carried their socks and shoes in their hands.

"Whatever happened?" I demanded. "Have you been fighting?"

"Gee, the kids laughed at us," little Harry growled. "Said we looked like a bunch of sissies!"

I discovered, then, that the other children wore nothing more elaborate than overalls to school, and usually went barefoot throughout the summer months. Naturally, our boys had been at a decided disadvantage in their more conventional regalia, and had been subjected to all kinds of taunts and rough treatment on account of it. Soon they were wearing overalls and going barefoot like the rest.

Suppertime came at six o'clock, a repetition of dinner. After it, the men piled into a buggy and drove down to the lake for a swim. Grandma and I sat and talked over the events of the day. We were neither of us over-enthusiastic about farm life. But Grandma Strange was soon going home to England. She was going to get out of it all. It was *I* who had to face the future, and I went to bed that night feeling very uncertain about it indeed.

To my own amazement I awoke the next morning feeling quite thrilled at the prospect of a new day. And that was how I always found it on the farm. However tired and discouraged I might be when I went to bed. I invariably awoke the next day feeling refreshed, and ready to tackle the business of the day with new hope. Surely there must be something in the very air of the prairies that puts life and heart into even the most drooping spirit!

Just before Grandma Strange went away, she and I unwittingly did something that greatly shocked the community.

We had decided that we would both like to do some horseback riding. Good saddle horses were available on the farm and we wanted to make the most of them. I had brought with me from California some new riding breeches, in which I felt I looked quite smart. Naturally I put them on to go riding in. Grandma was induced into a pair of Harry's army slacks. They were rather

a tight fit, I confess, but we trusted they would stand the strain.

Somewhat gingerly we rode forth, intending to visit a neighbour. Neither of us had ridden a Western stock saddle before. We found them very comfortable, however, and easy to ride. Personally I much prefer a stock saddle to our English saddles.

When we arrived at the neighbour's house we were met at the door with a decidedly frigid reception. We could not understand it at all. This same lady, a short time before, had treated us very cordially indeed. So charged was the atmosphere, in fact, that we only remained a few minutes and returned home wondering what on earth could be wrong.

We were not left very long in doubt. A few days later a deputation of ladies called at the shack and asked to see my husband alone.

They told him they had called to protest against my wearing breeches. They said that no women had ever appeared in such an immodest garb in that community before, and they wished to inform my husband that I must be stopped from ever appearing in such an outfit again. They did not mention Grandma, though I imagine they considered her appearance equally disgraceful.

My husband listened solemnly to them and promised that he would take me severely to task about it.

When he told me what had happened I was furious.

"What is it to do with any one what I wear?" I demanded. "I shall certainly please myself."

Defiantly I went on wearing the offending garments, and in time apparently wore the resistance down. But it was by way of being a hard-won victory, for I had to endure a constant atmosphere of disapproval, at least in certain quarters, all of which made those early days of mine the harder to live through.

Later, those same people who had so strongly disapproved of me became my very warm friends. Indeed, when sickness and trouble came my way, they were among the first to rally to my side, helping me with their sympathy, and with their actual presence, at times when I most needed and least expected them.

Yes, the first few days were bad enough, with Grandma Strange and Mrs. Auger both there, but how difficult I found things when both these anchors were taken away.

Mrs. Auger left first, at the end of a week, to join her husband in Stettler, where they were henceforth going to live. Grandma went away, a few weeks after that, to return to England for good.

I shall never forget my first few days on the farm without her. Nor, I am sure, will the people who shared them with me. I have often wondered, indeed, if any of the unfortunate men, who suffered my first attempts at cooking, are actually alive today to tell the tale.

Most brides do at least have the chance to practise on their husbands to begin with. I had no chance to practise at all. Neither Grandma nor Mrs. Auger had permitted

me to do anything but watch while they were around. So I had to give my initial performances at the cook-stove without any preliminary tryouts and the victims were people who were comparative strangers to me and who had, for the most part, been used to good cooking all their lives.

The first breakfast I cooked! How awful it was. The porridge boiled all over the stove and was incredibly lumpy and tasteless. The bacon was burned to a cinder. The pancakes were tough as leather. The toast was singed and the coffee had an unpleasant, acrid flavour.

Dinner, the main meal of the day, was even worse. It took me so long to wash the breakfast dishes and the cream separator, with all its little numbered discs that had to be put on in the correct order or else the machine would not work, and to clean up the shack and our bedrooms, that by the time I came to start preparations, the hour for dinner was alarmingly upon me. Despite my frantic efforts, I could not manage the ancient stove, which either would burn too fiercely, so that the top of it got red and terrified me out of my wits, or else would die down to the point of extinction and would have to be started up all over again.

The meat—I had procured with difficulty a roast of beef to replace the inevitable fried salt pork that had been our daily portion practically ever since we had come on the farm—was too underdone. The potatoes were soggy and the beans stringy. I had tried to make a pie, but the pastry turned out so brittle that the men had to cut it

with a knife and fork, and pieces of it kept shooting all over the table, to every one's embarrassment. The filling, which I had copied faithfully from an elaborate-looking cook-book, and which appeared so beautiful in the picture, turned out to be a runny mess.

I dropped dishes in my haste, scalded my fingers, upset the teapot. I kept the men waiting—an unforgivable sin. Altogether it was one of the most unpalatable and disastrous meals ever produced by any one, anywhere.

At night I was so tired and discouraged that I merely served up the remains and resigned myself to the worst. What was left of it was thrown to the pigs.

When I crawled into bed, I said to my husband:

"I'm beat. I'll never be able to do it."

But Harry patted me understandingly and answered:

"Don't despair, my dear. Remember what I told you. It's a fight for all of us. And anyway, we've a lot of pigs here. What are pigs for but for young wives to practise on?"

There was always such a lot of work to do. No one, to my mind; works harder than a farm woman, not even the farmer himself. Usually, too, she has no conveniences, and not even the mechanical aids that her husband has to make his work lighter in the fields. I know, even today, farmers who own big tractors but whose wives still haven't a washing machine.

It seemed to me that I was on my feet practically every minute of every day—from five in the morning till nine

or ten at night. Cooking, washing, scrubbing, sweeping, cleaning, mending—over and over again—and every job made doubly hard by my lack of experience and sometimes active dislike for the work.

Many times, I confess, I felt terribly close to quitting. I wanted to run away, anywhere, so long as I never saw the farm again. My nerves got on edge, and I was short and cranky with poor Harry and the boys, and even with the men. I used to cry a good deal, too. Once, I remember, one of the hired men put in a complaint, asking my husband to beg me not to cry so much at night, because it kept him awake.

In addition to doing the housework, I fed the chickens and gathered the eggs. This is considered the natural duty of the farm housewife and she is sometimes allowed to keep the money that results from the sale of such produce for her very own use. We didn't get enough eggs from our mongrel brood for anything but household use, so I was not able to make anything for myself out of them. I considered it bad enough to have to look after the chickens, but very soon another "chore" was added to what I privately felt to be my already overburdened shoulders.

This chore was the milking. When we came on the farm, the milking was being done by our hired man who lived in the old log house across the coulee. The make-shift log barn was there, so that it was an easy job for him to milk the two cows and carry over sufficient milk each morning and evening for our daily needs. The rest

he was allowed to keep for himself and his family. This man, however, was an ardent Socialist and we discovered that he was always inciting the other chaps to hold us up for higher wages, and was urging them on to take advantage of us in many little ways. He regarded us as "bloated capitalists" because we had been able to come in and purchase land for money instead of having to homestead it, as he had once done, and because we were able to hire men to work for us instead of having to work for others, as he himself was doing.

We had intended to keep this man on permanently, in order to help out his wife and family, but his behaviour became so disagreeable that we were finally forced to let him go. He revenged himself, by the way, by coming at night and helping himself to our hay. We caught him red-handed in the act, and when we remonstrated with him, he said: "Yes, I have been taking your hay and I am going to continue to take it. I have none and you have plenty. I'm entitled to my share!"

And he did keep on taking it, too, much to our exasperation. At last we had to haul him to Court, where he received a good dressing down from the judge, and was given the choice of a fine or a short term of imprisonment.

Some weeks later our neighbour was over visiting us, and in the course of conversation he let drop the fact that he had loaned this man twenty dollars with which to pay the fine. "He told me he would work it out for me," Bob said. "But he never has done so."

Of course, we refunded the twenty dollars. We have often laughed over the fact that we ourselves ended not only by losing hay but by paying the man's fine as well.

When the hired man left there was no one to do the milking. The men who were working for us all claimed that they could not milk, and we believed them. In a moment of misplaced enthusiasm, I offered to try my hand at it. How I regretted my unexpected facility at the job, for it became my regular chore for more than two years to follow.

The first time I approached the cows, I did not get a speck of milk out of either of them. I picked out what looked to be the more gentle of the two Shorthorns, and began on her. There I sat, pulling and tugging at the obstinate beast, until I was almost reduced to tears of weariness and chagrin. I found out, after a while, that I had been sitting on the wrong side.

But I didn't have any better success on the right. The cow knew that I was fresh to the business and she wasn't going to let down any milk. I gave up at last, but not without the determination to try her again on the morrow, and to keep on until I did get the better of her.

The next morning, bright and early, I went over to the barn and started in again. And this time, lo, the milk began to flow. I milked first one and then the other and managed to squeeze quite a creditable amount of milk from the teats of each. Of course their bags, not having been emptied the night before, were now filled to overflowing, and the animals were probably glad enough

to let the milk down, even with my inexperienced manipulations, to relieve themselves.

I was so proud of my success that at first I didn't mind the milking so very much. But that was in summertime. When winter came, it was a different story. Right up until Christmas we were forced to use the old log barn. It was a cold, dirty and draughty place and it certainly was no picnic to sit there, in sub-zero weather, milking a pair of indifferent cows. Sometimes, on my trip back to the house, I would slip and fall on the icy trails up and down the coulee banks, and would lose the contents of both my pails. Invariably there would be a thick coating of ice on the milk, even when I did get it safely home.

I suppose I might have been milking cows to the end, had not an accident occurred which provided me with the necessary impetus to turn the job over to more suitable hands.

I was milking our favourite cow, Bossie, one night in the twilight barn. It was just-light enough to shroud the building with eerie shadows and yet not dark enough to warrant the use of a lantern. That was why I did not see the big black cat that suddenly sprang onto old Bossie's back, digging her sharp claws into the unsuspecting cow's hide. All I knew was that a miniature cataclysm seemed suddenly to occur. My usually docile and gentle Bossie heaved her hind legs into the air and struck out with one rocklike foot in my direction.

My stool, my pail, and myself went flying. I, un-

fortunately, landed beneath the hoofs of the cow that was tethered in the other half of the stall. This creature, naturally incensed at the sudden rumpus, lit out at me.

By the time the two cows had finished with me, I was a sorry-looking spectacle. Both cheeks were black and blue, my jaw was cut and swollen, one tooth was broken off, and I was smeared from head to foot with blood and manure!

Somehow or other I managed to stagger up to the house, where I wrathfully bathed my bruised and battered face, changed my clothes, and laid myself down to await the arrival of sympathy and help.

To my utter disgust, the men seemed to find it hard to keep from laughing at my story and at me. And, to add insult to injury, when my husband came in the first thing he said was not: "Are you hurt, my dear?" but "Someone go right down to the barn and see if the cows are all right."

That settled things. No more milking for me! I have never milked a cow from that day to this and I shall never offer to do so again.



Five

The most important thing to be thought of, apart from the routine work, was the building of a house and barn.

This took quite a bit of consideration and discussion, and every one, including my young stepsons and the hired men, offered advice. Exciting hours were spent studying books and plans and specifications, and many were the decisions we made, only to change them at the last minute as time and time again some one came along with a piece of advice or criticism concerning our choice.

We finally decided on a California-style bungalow, consisting of eight rooms, about twenty-six by twenty-eight feet, and with its roof slightly raised to give us a good upper story. There was a commodious veranda clear across the front.

Upstairs the bedrooms had only slightly sloping roofs. There were two very large rooms in the front and two smaller ones at the back. Our own room had windows facing north and east; it was sometimes cold in winter-time, but delightfully cool in summer, and we had an excellent view of the lake. The other front room was

for the boys, and it was large enough to accommodate two double beds and one single bed, as well as the rest of the furniture. In summertime the men slept outside in the old shack, but in wintertime it was not warm enough there, so they came into the house and slept with the boys. We often had as many as five people sleeping comfortably in that big front room.

The back bedrooms faced south, with an uphill view. The larger one was really meant for a guest room but for many years we used it as well for an office or study and it was usually the untidiest room in the whole house. It was piled with Harry's books, papers, pamphlets, and other junk, and I dared not dust it or tidy it or move anything on penalty of my lord's dire displeasure. The smaller room was the bathroom, but since we were never able to install running water, it was always used as a bedroom. Eventually it became the "hired girl's" room.

Downstairs there were three rooms in the original plan. The kitchen was small—purposely planned so on my part since I was determined that we would not "live in the kitchen" as so many farm people seemed to do. I did, however, plan for a large living-room. My idea of a home was a place in which every room was used every day of the year. Certainly I did not intend to reserve the parlour as seemed to be the general custom, for special occasions—for company use only. Our living-room was going to be lived in. In the final design I had the builder remove the arch connecting the living- and dining-rooms, thus making one large room that ran the full length of

the house, with a big open fireplace in the centre and wide groups of windows at both ends and side.

Our fireplace was the most delightful thing of all about that living-room. It was built of rocks gathered from our own fields, many of them sparkling with beautiful colours like mosaic. There was a high, wide mantel, and a broad hearth. In my mind's eye I visioned a brass fender, with comfortable cushioned seats, around that hearth. I never achieved it though.

We also planned to have the house wired for electricity and the plumbing fixtures installed, in happy anticipation of the day when we would be able to afford the luxury of power and running water.

We selected the location for our house with particular care. There were several spots we favoured, but we were warned that water facilities and drainage on them might not be good. A spot, near where the shack stood, in the very centre of the farm, seemed to be about the best of all. It was on a high piece of land, overlooking a good many of the fields, and a splendid well was already in existence there. There was also a very fine view of the lake and the hills forming the northern horizon. We finally decided to build right where we already were.

The carpenters arrived from Stettler the first week in September. There were a foreman and four helpers. They set up tents for themselves, but I had to cook for them. They worked, it seemed, when they felt like it. Hardly a day passed without one or another of them

deciding to go into town for a change or quitting for some fancied grievance or disagreement with their boss. They were coming and going all the time, fresh faces almost every week. In addition, they almost drove us insane with their constant demands for increasingly exorbitant wages. They knew that we were "green," that we needed a house, and they meant to take advantage of our dilemma.

First of all, work commenced upon the digging of the cellar. This was accomplished with huge scrapers, drawn by teams of four horses. The dirt was scooped out and thrown into big piles on either side of the excavation. These piles of dirt remained long after the house was finished; indeed, for many years to come. They were the source of constant irritation and complaint on my part, to no avail. Invariably, when I demanded that they be removed and the yard cleaned up, so that I could make a nice garden in their place, I would be faced with the inevitable retort: "We're too busy now. Some other time."

I cannot remember what finally expedited their removal. One day, however, the scrapers were put to work and the dirt was dumped down into the coulee. The yard was at last fenced in and I planted some grass seed. But by this time I was almost ready to leave the farm. That is how it is, however. Months, even years, may go by before the farmer is able to turn his attention from routine work to the beautifying of his surroundings.

Several times, during the digging of the cellar, we

came upon coal. Coal, I knew, was plentiful in many parts of Alberta. Perhaps, I suggested, we had found a mine on our own farm. But the men laughed at me. It was only in certain well-defined areas, they explained, that the non-commercial mining of coal was worth while. A little farther to the west of us, for instance, there was coal in abundance on the banks of the Red Deer River, and some farmers used to go there and dig it out for themselves. But we found it more practicable, and even cheaper in the long run, to buy our fuel from the near-by Big Valley mines, where it could be purchased as cheaply as three dollars a ton.

When the walls of the cellar had been concreted, work began upon the actual construction of the house. It was then that our troubles started in real earnest. There was a grand to-do, I remember, over the building of the chimney. The man who had come to do the work decided that the weather was too cold to work outside and, having begun it, refused to finish it. No one else was willing to undertake the job, so finally my husband, who certainly up to that time had not included chimney building in the list of his many qualifications, jumped into the breach and painfully and laboriously finished its erection.

A right good job he made of it, too, even if it *was* a bit crooked where it emerged through the slope of the roof.

Another problem we encountered was the difficulty of getting lumber shipped down from Stettler, where we had purchased it. The lumber people were not to blame.

They would load it into cars and these cars would then have to be picked up by freight trains and shunted off at Fenn. Most of the time, however, the freight trains would refuse to pick them up. Once a car was loaded and brought down as far as Warden, a little in-between station, and there it was shunted off and left, and every freight that subsequently passed refused to have anything to do with it.

At last my husband became so exasperated by the delay that he sent a curt telegram to the superintendent of the railroad at Edmonton, demanding the right of way down the line for eight hours, so that he could take a team up the track and pull the car down with them himself. Needless to say, within a few hours of the despatch of this wire, we received one in reply assuring us that the car would be lifted immediately. And it was.

Another time the work was held up because there was no one available to haul a load that had arrived at Fenn. "All right," I said, "I will go and haul it home for you!" They laughed at me but finally let me go.

At Fenn I enlisted the services of the elevator man and some other men who happened to be around to help me load the lumber onto my wagon.

When it was all safely aboard I started for home. I managed nicely until I came to the hills. The first hill we went down the horses, impelled by the loaded wagon behind them, started to gallop, and by the time we reached the bottom, I had practically lost control of them. I have always wondered why they do not put

brakes on farm wagons, but I suppose it is for the good reason that an experienced driver knows how to "hold the horses in." At that time, however, I had neither the skill nor the strength to manage my team and I was very frightened indeed. Fortunately there was a hill going up again a short distance farther on, and this automatically stayed my bolting team's progress and brought them back to a normal trot.

Now, however, another problem confronted me. We had been climbing for a few minutes when I noticed that I constantly had to allow the reins, or lines as they are called in the West, to slip through my fingers, until I seemed to be an extraordinarily long way from the horses. Looking downward I discovered that I was slowly but surely moving backward on the load of lumber! There was an increasingly widening space between the front end of the wagon and the ends of the boards on which I was perched.

Suddenly I realized what was happening. Owing to the sharp incline upward, and to the fact that the boards had not been securely roped in, the entire load was slipping off. Presently, if we did not reach the top of the hill in time, it would slip right off on to the trail.

I was now nearing the ends of the lines, and there was nothing left for me to do but to jump down into the half-empty wagon box, lean over the front end, and strain all my attention on keeping the horses in hand. The boards, I decided, could take care of themselves.

Just before we reached the top of the hill, my load

crashed off with a terrific clatter and was completely scattered.

Fortunately there was a farmhouse a few hundred yards away and, after carefully tying my team to a fence post, I went there seeking help. The good farmer very kindly sent a couple of his men back with me to assist with the reloading. After a while I was safely on my way again, this time with the lumber securely roped in.

I managed to reach home without further accident, and the family enjoyed a good laugh at my expense when I told them what had happened.



Six

All the time the new house was being built, people would drop over and take a look at its progress. Sometimes they would call in at the shack and see me, and I would proudly escort them over the slowly growing framework. Sometimes, however, they would be complete strangers, who would not even trouble to pass the time of day with me. They would drive up to the place, saunter around, look things over and perhaps make a note or two, and then depart. I thought this rather cool cheek, but I suppose they meant well enough and were really rather complimenting us by showing an interest in our doings.

It was taking so long to get the house built that I soon came to the conclusion that the shack would have to be our home for some time yet to come. I decided, therefore, to make some changes and improvements that would render our living conditions there more practicable and pleasant.

First of all I had the men fix up the hole outside the door. The rubbish was cleaned out, the sides squared

off and boarded up, and shelves erected all round. The shack itself, which was on runners, was then hitched up to four horses and pulled over it. A trapdoor, cut in the centre of the floor, and a staircase leading down, completed the job, and we were thus provided with a cool little cellar in which to store food and necessities.

Inside the shack we constructed additional shelves to accommodate our more extensive crockery and household equipment, and the precious library of books which my husband and I had accumulated between us.

Several yards of brightly patterned cretonne were used for curtaining the windows and shelves and for cushions for the davenport. The nails were pulled out of the walls and the men persuaded to hang their clothes on curtained pegs. The white oilcloth-topped table was covered with a warm felt cloth when not in use for meals. Some of our pictures hung on the walls, a vase or two of flowers were always around, and the place began to take on a new air. Of course, it was far from being the kind of home we had dreamed of, but at least it had now acquired some of our own personality and that gave it a homelike atmosphere.

We did not have very much in the way of furniture. We had taken over the few things that were already in the shack when we arrived, and had augmented them by some home-made pieces. For instance, a quite attractive dressing-table was contrived out of a packing case and a few scraps of cretonne. A couple of boxes, nailed one atop of the other, and curtained with some more cretonne,

provided a neat wash-table, with a concealed space for face cloths, tooth brushes, shaving-tackle and so forth.

Now and again we picked up pieces of furniture at auction sales, many of which were taking place at that time about the countryside. The first of these sales that we attended was held on the farm of a neighbour who was leaving for the United States. The place was about twelve miles to the north of us, so we set out prepared to make a day of it.

When we arrived, just around noon, we found a large crowd assembled in the farm yard. As each newcomer arrived, he was handed a paper bag containing a thick pork sandwich, a slice of apple pie and an orange. Near the back door of the farmhouse was a table, from which the auctioneer himself dispensed cups of coffee. This was the "free lunch" advertised on the hand-bills announcing the sale.

As soon as every one had finished eating, the auctioneer mounted a box, called for attention, and the sale began.

All the goods to be disposed of were piled up in the open air outside the house. There was everything from a potato masher to an iron bedstead, from a frying pan to a plough.

The auctioneer, in private life a butcher and cattle-buyer, started off with the smaller household goods first, holding them up one after the other for the bidding of the crowd, finally working through to the cattle and farm implements, which were auctioned off last of all.

His "line" was amusing and very colloquial. It was

enlivened by a keen sense of humour and characterized by a skilful playing upon the likes and dislikes, the friendships and enmities, of his prospective customers, most of whom he had known intimately for the best part of their lives.

To our surprise, some of the articles sold at prices quite disproportionate to their actual value. For instance, we saw an old plough sold for ten dollars more than its actual value when new, while a good bed, complete with spring and mattress, went for a mere song. We saw a horse, with a good saddle and bridle thrown in, sell for the almost incredible sum of two dollars, while a dubious mirror, in a chipped gilt frame, fetched seven-fifty.

I had previously cast my own eyes over the clutter of household goods that were to be disposed of, and had picked out for my own bidding on that occasion (if, when the time came, I could summon up the courage to shout out my price above the clamour of unfamiliar voices around me), a good-sized copper wash-boiler, in which were packed a dozen or more half-gallon glass jars or sealers, and a sewing-machine which appeared to be in fair condition.

I managed to secure both the boiler and the sewing-machine, and carried them home with me quite elated at what I considered to be my bargains. But when I came to examine the boiler, I found that the bottom was pierced with tiny holes, and that many of the sealers were cracked, which rendered the entire purchase practically valueless. When, later, I looked up the price of sewing-machines in

a furniture catalogue, I discovered that for two dollars less than I had paid for the relic I had secured, I could have purchased a new one.

I was not the only member of our family to get "stung" on that occasion, however. A short time before the sale my husband, who had not expected to be present himself, had mentioned to a neighbour that he needed a pickaxe and had suggested that if a good one was offered, would he kindly bid on it for him.

At the last moment Harry went along. During the afternoon a pickaxe came up for sale and my husband promptly bid on it. There was quite a lot of brisk bidding on this article and eventually the amount reached a mark considerably beyond the original value. At this point my husband retired from the fray, leaving some unseen opponent in possession.

A few minutes later a man touched him on the shoulder.

"I got that axe for you, Major Strange," he said, proudly. "I'm afraid I paid a bit more for it than it was worth, but some guy kept bidding and bidding against me, and it got me mad, so I had to keep on going to cut him out."

Naturally they both had a good laugh when they realized that, owing to the size of the crowd and my husband's absent-mindedness, they had been bidding against each other without knowing it.

That is the funny side to an auction sale. There is often, alas, a tragic one. So often it is misfortune, rather than good fortune, that necessitates the breaking up and sale of a farm home. So often there are tears in the eyes, and

an ache in the hearts of those who thus see their simple worldly possessions being handed over to the keeping of strange and often unappreciative hands.

"Nothing but a bunch of worthless sticks!" I once heard a visitor remark at an auction sale. Worthless sticks to the casual beholder, perhaps, but often dear and highly prized possessions to those who are parting with them. Old sticks, of little intrinsic value, but sticks that once constituted that precious thing called a home.

Our actual living conditions, during those early days, were both difficult and amusing at the same time.

Our sanitary arrangements, for instance, were primitive in the extreme. Any one who has read Chick Sales' famous little book, *The Specialist*, which describes the activities of a rural carpenter whose specialty was the building of "small houses," will understand what these conditions connoted. Needless to say we ran the whole gamut of emotions, from extreme discomfort to almost convulsing merriment in our own necessary association with them.

For some time we used coal oil or kerosene lamps, like our neighbours. But the inevitably daily cleaning, trimming, polishing and filling of them (a job abhorred by every farm woman, I am sure) coupled with the poor light they gave, soon exasperated me beyond endurance, and I set about finding a better means of illumination.

I discovered that the gasoline lamp and lantern, although considerably more costly in their initial outlay,

and a trifle more expensive to operate, were the best of all and certainly compensated one for their extra cost by the beautiful light¹ they gave and the greater safety they assured², both in the house and in the barn. Later, a friend sent us some acetylene lanterns from England to experiment with, but after one or two explosions that nearly blew the roof off the house, we decided that they were not practicable on a Canadian farm.

Lack of electricity and mechanical power, however, never bothered me to anything like the extent that lack of running water did. Doing without running water was my greatest tribulation of all.

We had a splendid well on the farm, with plenty of good cold water in it, but the water was one hundred and fifty feet down in the earth and could only be brought to the surface by means of the three-horse-power gasoline engine or the hefty arm of a very strong man, and even after that it had to be carried from the pump house to the dwelling house by hand, a pailful at a time.

Never having looked upon water as a luxury before, I was constantly too extravagant in my use of it, so that, however many pails the men had pumped for me before leaving for work in the morning, I was always waterless by the time they arrived back at noon and desperately in need of further supplies.

Being driven to near desperation by this inadequate method of water supply, I set my wits to devise a new and more practical one.

Finally I had my husband purchase for me a galvanized



iron tank which could hold about fifty gallons of water. This had a close-fitting cover which could be removed when the tank was being filled or cleaned out. The tank was set on a table some three feet high and a tap inserted in the lower part of it.

Next we procured several lengths of iron piping, which were laid down about six inches deep in the ground, between the pump and the shack. I had the tank placed on the shady side of the shack during the summer and inside during the winter. Beside it the pipe emerged from the ground, rose up above it and dipped into it. When the engine was running, the water would flow effortlessly from the well, across to the tank, and I was thus provided with sufficient water to last me all day.

In wintertime the pipes froze and were no longer usable. (We should have had to set them down eight feet to ensure their being below the frost level.) So we took them up and set them aside till spring, carrying the water across in pails by hand. It took twenty pails, or ten trips, to fill the tank, and many a time I have done it. But even this was a much more effective method of providing a good supply of water than the original practice of pumping and using it a few pails at a time.

As soon as this "water system" of mine was in full running order, I decided to indulge in the long-deferred luxury of a real bath. So far, the best I had been able to manage had been a hand bowl, washing myself up and down in a sketchy fashion. But now that water was no longer at a premium, why not take a regular tub?

It seemed to me that it would be quite delightful, on one of those scorchingly hot afternoons that we were enduring at that time, to take an open-air bath, and not only get really clean for once but also get properly cooled off at the same time.

Accordingly I took the largest wash-tub I could find, and set it in the comparative shade between two granaries. The hired men were all away at work in the fields and the carpenters were too busy at work on the house to bother looking in my direction. Besides, I was more or less screened from the scene of their operations by the line of granaries. To ensure a further measure of privacy, however, I tacked a sheet across the space from one granary to another at one end and a green and red hammock across at the other.

When everything was ready, I undressed myself inside the granary, wrapped a towel about me, and slipped out and into the tub.

I was revelling in the heavenly luxury of almost complete immersion, when I suddenly heard the trampling of hoofs near-by, and all at once a big black and white cow came charging into my hammock, plunged through my "bathroom" and disappeared out through the other opening with the hammock and the sheet draped grotesquely about its horns.

Before I could gather together my scattered wits, I heard a man's voice calling, close at hand:

"Hey, Bossie! Hey, Bossie!"

I realized at once that some one was evidently chasing



the cow and that at any moment he might come upon me.

"Don't come round this way," I yelled out. "Go the other way!"

But it was too late. At that moment a man appeared before me.

For one awful moment we stared at each other, I standing naked in the tub, and the man, whom I now recognized to be one of my neighbours, apparently rooted to the spot in surprise.

I grabbed for my towel, enveloped myself in it, and crouched down in the water.

The man disappeared and I leaped for my granary. But he had gone that way, too! We met again, face to face for the second time. Frantically I hurled myself into the sanctuary of my bedroom, slammed the door, and sank down exhausted.

Later I learned that when I had run around the granary, I had exposed myself to some of the carpenters, who had heard the disturbance and were looking that way, and who had been highly entertained at seeing a half-naked female apparently playing hide-and-seek with a strange man.

It happened that on that particular afternoon one of the carpenters fell from the roof and injured his hip and that another went off his head during the night and had to be taken, a short time afterwards, to the local insane asylum. I stoutly maintain, of course, that neither of these two incidents had anything whatever to do with my

own bathing escapade. The remarkable coincidence of events, however, supplied my practical joker of a husband with material for a good story—the catastrophe of the bath and the misfortunes of the two carpenters being linked together in a tale that loses none of its significance in the telling.



Seven

At the time of our arrival at the farm, the particular work in progress was what is known as "summer fallowing."

Summer fallow is that portion of the land which is allowed to lie fallow, or idle, in any one year in readiness for next season's crop. The practice of summer fallowing is followed by most good farmers in the West every second or third year, with the object of storing up moisture and thus giving an average of more than one year's rainfall for one year's crop. It is particularly necessary in areas given to "dry" farming, such as our own, because one could not always be sure of an abundant and sufficient rainfall. The land is ploughed deep in order that it may receive such moisture as does fall and is then worked over with discs and harrows to prevent the growth of weeds, every one of which, if allowed to grow, acts like a little pump, draining the land of its moisture.

On the first day of August, haying commenced. We had approximately three hundred acres of land in wild prairie hay. Our land was noted throughout the countryside for the quality of the hay it produced, and it usually

provided the farm with several times more than we needed for our own use. We were thus able to sell a portion of it each year and reap a slight additional income in that fashion.

Haying, on a Western farm, like most other operations, was done, I discovered, on a grand scale. Ten to twelve acres a day per man, with a mower and a team of horses, was the usual day's work. It resulted, that first year of ours, in an average of a ton and a half of good hay to the acre. After the hay had been cut with the mowers, it was permitted to lie in the swath to cure for one or two days, depending on the weather. It was then raked into "windrows" with a wide rake, and these windrows, with the same rake, were cocked up into piles about eight feet across and five feet high.

These piles were then stacked in a most ingenious and interesting fashion. First of all, a contrivance known as a hay slide was constructed. This was made of poles, and was about ten feet wide and twenty feet long, rising into the air at an angle of about forty-five degrees.

The cocks, as many as six or seven of them at once, were pulled up the slide by means of an implement known as a "buckrake." This is a wide affair made of heavy timbers, with wings projecting from each end. It is drawn by a team of four horses.

The buckrake, with its load of hay, was pulled close to the slide, the horses unhitched, and then, by means of an arrangement of pulleys and ropes, the hay was pulled clear to the top of the slide and dumped off. One man,

at the top, received it and forked it into place, tramping it down the centre. The hay stacks, when finished, were about ten feet wide, one hundred and twenty feet long, and eight to ten feet high.

Since August was not what might be called a busy month in the life of the farm — the grain was now growing safely without any assistance from man — many odd jobs were undertaken and got out of the way. For instance, fences were repaired, gardens attended to, yards cleaned up, and machinery and implements fixed in readiness for the forthcoming harvest season.

One interesting thing we set ourselves to do that first summer was to dig a ditch through the low portion of our land known as "the flat."

The flat, we had been warned, had to be carefully drained, otherwise parts of it might become flooded and we could expect weeds to be washed down from the fields of neighbours. To effect proper drainage we decided to construct a ditch that would carry all superfluous water off the land to the road and thence to the lake, about half a mile distant.

In digging the ditch we made considerable use of dynamite. Of course, the dynamite had to be handled very carefully, for in the hands of inexperienced men it might have resulted in some accidents. Harry, who had been used to its handling in the Klondike, supervised all the work himself, and everything went off very satisfactorily. There were, however, some amusing incidents in connection with this part of the work.

For instance, on the first day my husband brought down the box, containing some twenty-five pounds of dynamite, fuse caps and matches, and placed it in what he considered to be a safe spot some distance away from where the men were working. The tractor man, who was ploughing up and down in the ditch itself, had a habit of turning at one end and returning to the beginning along the level land on top. My husband, taking a look around to see that everything was going along all right, saw the tractor come trundling up out of the ditch and proceed along the top for another journey. He waved his hand to the man and then started off for home. Glancing back, a few moments later, he saw to his surprise that the tractor was following him. The man had evidently taken his wave for some sort of signal to follow. The alarming part of it was that the tractor was proceeding directly in line with the box of dynamite, which was almost hidden in the long grass.

My husband waved his arms frantically and shouted to the man to go back. Then, realizing that he was not making himself understood, he started back himself to stop him. It was too late, however. Before he could reach the tractor it had run clear over the box.

Naturally, he thought that the entire outfit, tractor and man, would go up in the air in a terrific explosion. Nothing of the kind happened, however. The tractor proceeded merrily on its way, coming to a standstill at my husband's side.

By this time a dark cloud of smoke was emerging

from the box. This, after a time, actually subsided without any explosion taking place. When it was finally investigated, the men found that the matches and fuse had burned but that by some miracle the dynamite had escaped. As a matter of fact, although it is not generally known, dynamite to be exploded is not burned, but is detonated with the loud crash of the detonator cap. It will, however, burn slowly and fizzle. Only once in a million cases, though, will it fail, once it has been set alight, finally to explode.

We had a dog that used to go down with the men, which seemed to bear a charmed life. Every time they would set a fuse, the dog would go nosing around the spot and it was quite a job to get him away before the stuff exploded. Once, indeed, this animal sat himself down right on top of a hole charged with dynamite and did not get away soon enough. He was blown several feet into the air with the dirt, but he came running over to us afterwards, without so much as showing a scorched tail.

August, too, was a slightly less busy time for the women-folk, though goodness knows farm women work hard enough at any time of the year, even in winter. During August, I found, many of my neighbours stole time off to go berry hunting — not only for use on the table daily but also with a view to storing up a winter's supply. Canned wild berries are delicious, and in our district we had an abundance of saskatoons, raspberries, strawberries,

gooseberries, pincherries, chokecherries, cranberries, blueberries, black currants and red currants, from which could be made jams, jellies and preserves to beat anything I have ever tasted.

They made good wine, too, though I must confess I never quite got around to making any. But some of my neighbours were adept at this job. I once went into a so-called temperance home, where the hostess very kindly offered me a glass of raspberry juice, as she called it. It was raspberry wine, as a matter of fact, and it certainly had a "kick" in it. But crowning all this was an occasion when an abstemious friend introduced me for the first time to dandelion wine. It looked like innocent stuff, and I was given to understand that it was non-alcoholic. I took a glass. It did not go to my head. It went to my feet. I could not rise. Fortunately, the fumes soon wore off and I was all right again and did not disgrace myself. After that, however, I gave this so-called innocent beverage a wide berth.

Many an afternoon, when the boys came home from school, we would all go off together to hunt berries. The countryside was at its best. Fields turning golden stood side by side with fields of deepest green; interspersed between them would be patches of summer fallow, chocolate-brown against the brighter shades of green. Along the banks of the roads, and even in the fields, there was colour, colour everywhere, bright flowers rearing their heads above the grains and grasses.

*"The face of nature smiles serenely gay;
And even the motley race of weeds enhance,
Her rural charms."*

In later years these pretty flowers, these weeds as they really were, had to be ruthlessly cut out.

Down in the deep coulees it was always cool, with sweet odours filling the air and a drowsy atmosphere hanging over all the shadowed world. As one wandered from bush to bush, one could hear the incessant humming and buzzing of a myriad flies and small insects, the soft droning of bees, the clear singing of birds. Of course, one also got a bite or two, and in some years the mosquitoes were so bad that one had to give up berry-picking altogether. But a few mosquitoes could not spoil the beauty and peace of the berry patches, and the reward more than compensated one for a little irritation that had to be endured.

August was also a time for a certain number of social activities. In fact, there was organized that year a regular Community Club, quite apart from the farmers' existing organizations, which undertook to plan and arrange sports days, picnics and so forth. The Club purchased a piece of land down by the lake, laid out a couple of tennis courts and a baseball diamond, and built two quite decent bath-houses.

On this spot the annual community picnic was held. People came from other communities for miles around; I met not only all my neighbours but many people who foregathered in this fashion only once a year. There were

even business men and their wives and families from near-by towns of Stettler and Big Valley, all of them chatting and making friends with the farmers and sharing with them in their simple outdoor pleasures. Little groups of men could be seen standing around all day long talking about weather conditions, crop prospects, possible prices. Women, with babies in their arms and little ones tugging at their skirts, discussed household problems and the latest rural scandals.

"Lunch" was served between twelve and two and "supper" between five and seven. We farm women took turns at standing behind a roughly built counter and dispensing, cafeteria fashion, plates of meat and salad, pies and cakes, which were carried by young girls to the visitors, who were seated at long tables set up beneath intertwined boughs.

And such food as was served! Here let me "take off my hat" to the wonderful cooking of the Western farm woman. I became quite a good cook myself before the end, but never did I reach the perfection at baking that characterized most of my neighbours. Bread that was so white and light that it tasted almost like cake. Cake that was so rich and luscious that it fairly melted in your mouth. Pies that not only looked beautiful but tasted so delectable that one came back for more and more. Some of the women must have spent many precious hours over the concoction of those delicious delicacies. But it was worth it. Never, even in the best hotels, had I ever eaten, nor have I eaten since, food that tasted quite so good.

The afternoon and evening were taken up with sports for the children, ball games for the local baseball teams, swimming matches, races and so forth. Last of all, there was an open-air concert. This, however, had to be interrupted, for the mosquitoes finally drove the audience down the road to the school house, to conclude their festivities there.



Eight

During the last few weeks of August, the grain ripened with amazing rapidity. It was a truly beautiful sight. It seemed cruel indeed that the iron hand of the reaper must soon pass over those glorious golden acres, across which the sun and breezes danced daily in waves of constantly changing light.

But pass over it must. The day came, all too soon, when the order went forth: "Cutting starts tomorrow. All hands get ready!" From that moment work commenced in real earnest.

Up until harvest time we had managed with our regular staff. Now, with so much extra work to do, we immediately engaged more men. I soon learned that the West is a country of "seasonal" work and that there are "specialists" in almost every branch of it. Certain men, for instance, handle the binders; others do the stooking; there are field pitchers and spike pitchers, and there are mechanics who attend to the threshing machine and whose business it is to keep both grain separator and engine running full speed ahead.

In those days men were swarming to the Western prairies from all parts of the Dominion, and even from England. Each train arriving in Stettler and Big Valley carried its quota of would-be harvest workers. They would stand around on the streets, waiting for some farmer to come along and pick them up and give them a job.

There were Toms and Dicks and Johns and Jacks, and innumerable Bills and Charlies. Very rarely you learned their surnames, except perhaps on the day you came to pay them off, and even then they always preferred to take cash rather than a cheque. There were young men and old men; short men and tall men; lean men and fat men. There were the workers and the shirkers; the adventure-seekers and the frankly down-and-outers. There were the mysterious ones, too. And all of them with an eye on the harvest fields.

These transient workers ranged all the way from lawyers and chartered accountants to school teachers and store clerks; from mechanics and taxi-drivers to bootleggers and trappers; and a great many of them, of course, were farm-born boys. That first summer we quartered our men, like ourselves, in granaries and tents. Later, when we had the house finished, we turned the old shack into a bunk house. But always, through all the years that we lived on the farm, the men ate with us, and usually sat with us too. Many and many a time I longed for the luxury of a "home to myself," and for years I dreamed of

an up-to-date bunk house, in which we could house and feed the men comfortably and so enjoy the privacy we longed for. Unfortunately we were never able to afford this.

Even the best of hired men usually present a sort of picturesque raggedness in their attire. Torn khaki or blue denim shirts, loose khaki pants or bibbed overalls, heavy work boots, greasy sweaters, rakish caps or soiled sombreros—these are the customary habiliments of the Western hired man. And how handsome some of the boys look in this unconventional garb, to be sure.

Right here I am going to confess that my own husband was usually the most disreputable-looking person on the farm. Immaculate almost to a fault when he went to the city, on the farm he indulged in the oldest of clothes, left his whiskers untrimmed for weeks at a time and his hair uncut sometimes for months on end. It was useless to remonstrate with him. He was happy and comfortable, he said, and that was all there was to it.

It was no uncommon sight to see rips in pants precariously held together with nails. Nails, in fact, were at all times far more popular than needles and thread and seemed to serve the same purpose to an astonishingly satisfactory degree. I remember only one man who took the time and energy to wash and mend his own clothes. He was an elderly man who had no use for my new-fangled washing-machine (run by hand, by the way) and who was as fastidious as a woman about a hole or a rent.

His socks and his underwear were always neatly darned; every tear was repaired at once and every hole neatly patched. But he was a man in a million.

The stories behind these men ranged all the way from pathos to bathos.

Among that first harvest crew, for instance, was a man who came to us from the employment bureau in Edmonton. He was a tall, intellectual-looking chap, with a mass of iron-grey hair and rather tragic-looking eyes. It was plain to see that he was not an experienced harvest hand. He had a quiet, cultured voice. His manners were those of an educated man, and although he tried his best to get along with the rest of the men, and to be one of them, he was obviously very ill at ease and unhappy in their company.

On the second day he went into the shack after the morning's work and promptly keeled over. We sent for a doctor who came and ordered that he cease work immediately. His heart was in a very bad condition and any further physical exertion might prove fatal.

It was only then that we learned that this man was a solicitor in Vancouver, who, through ill-fortune, had recently lost a great deal of money. He had come to the harvest fields of Alberta in an endeavour to lose his identity and to earn sufficient money to keep himself going until he could see something ahead for the future.

On the other hand there was a mean-looking little man we had picked up in Stettler. We sent him up to a field where he was by himself. A neighbour, whose

farmhouse overlooked this particular field, came over during the afternoon on some errand, and remarked:

"That new man of yours seems to be taking things mighty easy. He set up one stook after dinner and then lay down and he hasn't moved since."

When the man came down to the house, my husband asked him how much work he had done.

"None at all," was the cheerful reply.

"Well, you're fired!" my husband exploded. "Off you go!"

"That's all right, boss. Give me my pay."

"Certainly not," my husband exclaimed. "You've done no work, you get no pay."

"All right," said the man. Then he added, with a cunning sort of a grin, "But you'd be surprised, boss, to know how many of them do pay me. I've made quite a bit of money this year already and never done a tap of work."

And off he went, no doubt to try the same tricks on some other trusting farmer.

There were also another couple who were interesting. They were French-Canadians and were splendid specimens of expert harvest workers. How they ever came to team up together was always a mystery to me. Lawrence was the complete antithesis of Philippe. Lawrence was short and stocky whereas Philippe was tall and lean. Philippe was silent almost to the point of taciturnity, whereas Lawrence talked a blue streak and kept the rest of the crew in constant gales of laughter with his stories,

his jokes and his songs. Fall after fall, for many years, they appeared together, worked for us and passed on. They returned at the end of each season to their own deep forests and frozen streams of Quebec.

Lawrence, as I have said, was of diminutive stature, but he was hard as nails and had the strength of an ox. Once or twice in later years, as sometimes happens, we got a "bully" among the crew—some chap who tried to put it over the others. But no one ever put it over Lawrence. In his own inimitable fashion the little man was more or less the boss of every crew he ever worked with.

I can see him yet, sitting outside the shack of a summer evening, whittling a piece of wood and singing in his husky and not unpleasant tenor, old French-Canadian folk songs, some of which have only recently been committed to the printed page. The one I remember best of all is an old lumber song, which runs as follows:

*"Quand nous partons des chantiers,
Mes amis, rous le coeur gai,
Pour aller voir tous nos parents,
Mes cher amis, le coeur content.
Envoyons d'l' avant
Nos gens
Envoyons d'l' avant."*

Send her along, along!

From rise of sun to fall of dusk the great clattering binders droned up and down the great fields, cutting the

grain and tying it into bundles, which in turn were pitched out at regular intervals on the ground.

Following the binders came the stookers, men whose business it was to gather up the heavy-headed sheaves and stack them into stooks. Stooking is one of the hardest and most back-breaking jobs on a Western farm. There is a decided knack in standing the bundles upright on their butts, leaning together, eight bundles to a stook, with a bundle broken down the centre laid on top as a cap to divert the rain and to ensure that the colour of the grain will be held. An experienced stooker—and it takes years to become one—can keep up with an eight-foot binder all day long on an average crop. Newcomers, however, find it heart-breaking work.

In this connection, one of the saddest sights I think I ever saw happened a few years later. Some ten thousand men had been sent out from the Old Country to work in the Canadian harvest fields. Among them were some Welsh miners. They had been told that any one could do the work and that they would receive five dollars a day for doing it.

Unfortunately some of them were sent to our district. We took two of them on and set them to work stooking. Poor lads! After two or three hours attempting to stook the grain, they came up to the house absolutely exhausted, their hands bleeding, the heart entirely taken out of them.

"We simply cannot do it," they said. "We cannot understand how any human being can do that kind of work."

We asked one of the boys, who was expert at the job,

to show them how easily it could be done. But they never learned. Of course, they could not be expected to learn right away, for it takes years and years of practice to be able to perform this and other Western farming operations with skill and speed and with the least possible physical exertion.

When the cutting and stooking were finally finished, the fields shorn of their golden crops, and nothing remained but yellow, stook-dotted stubble, I was told to anticipate the arrival of the threshing gang.

Threshing! What a hectic time that was.

In our district threshing was usually done by one or another of the local farmers who happened to be the fortunate possessor of a threshing machine, or separator as it is called, and who would go around doing what is known as "custom threshing." For custom threshing there was a charge of so much a bushel, depending on the ruling prices for grain in that particular year. The farmer carried a threshing crew and was helped in addition by the farmer and his hired men (and sometimes by neighbours, who "exchanged work") for whom the threshing was to be done. Many a farmer worked out an appreciable portion of his threshing charges by giving labour in lieu of hard cash.

We were threshed that first year by Bob Sutfin, our nearest neighbour. Bob was really quite a character in his way. He had come up from the States some ten or fifteen years before and had homesteaded in our district. He was a kindly faced, placid sort of individual. Nothing

ever seemed to ruffle him. I have seen him experience the most disastrous accidents and the most irritating breakdowns, which caused the loss of many precious hours of time and the expenditure of much cash, without for a moment losing his sunny smile or his unfailing good humour. His customary retort to all such calamities was: "Well, it might have been worse!"

How unlike Bob was my own husband. Harry is dynamic, impatient of delay, irritated by inefficiency, and particularly by stupidity, and is sometimes, like all husbands of course, exceedingly trying to live with. When things went wrong, as they often did, perhaps in the house but more frequently in the fields, Harry would fly into some pretty rages. His tempers, however, were like summer storms—violent and devastating while they lasted, but soon over, forgotten and done with. I got used to these storms, as did every one else on the farm, and generally knew how to handle them.

I can see him yet when something happened out in the fields—a machine broke down, perhaps, or the engine of the tractor stopped working at an inopportune moment because of some one's carelessness—take off the inevitable straw hat he always wore, throw it on the ground, and stamp on it till it was a mass of pulp. Fortunately, straw hats were cheap and easily obtainable at the Fenn store. He used an awful lot of them.

One night Harry came in with the tidings: "The threshers will be on our place tomorrow morning. Have plenty of food!"

A neighbour girl had come over to give me a hand and it was under her guidance that I had stocked up with the necessary abundance of fare to cope with this anticipated visit. I was decidedly nervous, however, at the prospect of having to feed between twelve and fifteen hungry men three times a day, but I was also determined to go through with it as to the manner born, and to earn, if possible, compliments rather than complaints.

"Yes, I'm ready," I said grimly. "Let 'em come!"

Next morning they came. While it was still dark I heard the roar of a tractor pulling into our yard. Looking out of the window I saw the huge machine which so ingeniously changes the sheaves into kernels of grain and stacks of straw. The separator! Wagons and racks, with men aboard, followed closely behind, and presently the whole procession had passed by and disappeared down the hill towards the first field upon which work was to commence.

To the accompaniment of the distant hum of the engine, I went about my work of preparing the voluminous meals.

Talk about a groaning board! With all the leaves in the dining-table, and an extra table pushed up alongside at one end, it was not nearly big enough to accommodate the hungry horde that for three days assembled around it, nor was it strong enough to bear the burden of heavy dishes and loaded platters that covered it from one end to the other. We had to eat in two sittings, and the cook and myself seldom got a mouthful until the men had

been satisfied and had retired outside. Sometimes, I confess, there was very little left for us at all.

For breakfast we gave the men big bowls of porridge with plenty of cream and sugar. This was followed by sausages, or bacon and eggs, sometimes steak, accompanied always by fried potatoes, and lots of bread thickly plastered with butter. On the table there would also be dishes of fruit, jam and marmalade, all of which was consumed by the spoonful out of small dishes. Strong coffee washed it down.

For dinner they had roast meat with boiled potatoes and quantities of thick gravy. There would be two or more vegetables fresh from the garden, cooked, not in saucepans (I could not find any big enough) but in buckets. As we had to bake bread practically every day now, they would usually have hot bread fresh from the oven or baking-powder biscuits, which would be literally soaked with butter. For dessert there would be pies, pies and yet more pies, and cups of good strong tea.

Supper was more or less a repetition of dinner, excepting that the meat would be eaten cold and would be accompanied by fried potatoes (left over from dinner) or a potato salad, or a mixed salad of garden stuff. The pies would be replaced by bowls of cooked fruit, either dried or canned, and platters of rich, heavily iced cake. And again, more tea.

How rapidly everything disappeared. Hardly a word would be spoken throughout the entire meal, excepting to voice such necessary requests as "Pass the milk." or

"Pass the spuds." Food was consumed quickly and voraciously, and often audibly, and table manners were usually conspicuous by their absence, except with the fastidious few. The moment a man had partaken of his fill he would push back his chair, grab a toothpick from the inevitable little dish of them set at each end of the table, and repair to the outside, there to snatch a hasty smoke before work or chores should commence again.

It was the custom during threshing, we discovered, to serve also what is known as a "lunch" in the middle of the morning and again in mid-afternoon. The hours were long between regular meals and the men needed something to sustain them, so tea would be taken down to them in large containers and it would be accompanied by lard pails packed with sandwiches, cake or pie. Work did not actually cease while this lunch was being consumed, a few men at a time stopping for the rest and pick-me-up.

Enjoying afternoon tea ourselves, we continued to serve it long after the threshing crew had gone, and finally it became a general habit on the farm all the year round. We would either carry it out to the men in the fields where they were working, or, if they happened to be near the house, they would come in and take a brief rest. We always found this to be a profitable investment of time and energy, since the men invariably worked better after the stimulant.

I only found one chance, that first year, to go down to the fields and actually watch the threshing in progress. It was an interesting and inspiring sight. Around me,

vast and golden, stretched the great fields. At a certain chosen spot stood the separator, throbbing and humming as the leather belt revolved rapidly between it and the engine. Racks stood at intervals about the field that was being threshed. Beside them stood brown-armed, brown-faced men, forking up the bundles and pitching them aboard. Every now and then the racks would move slowly forward until they were loaded to capacity with the gleaming sheaves. Then their drivers would climb atop and ride lurchingly towards the outfit.

Around the separator itself was a scene of lively activity and apparent confusion. Belts were whirring, wheels turning, bundles of grain were flying from wagons into the separator, and from a funnel on one side a steady stream of chaff and straw was being blown into a huge stack while through another funnel came the precious kernels of grain, pouring in a ceaseless stream into the bin that stood near-by.

Noise and apparent confusion . . . what really was happening? I wondered.

I soon learned that on the farm, as everywhere else in life, there are really two pictures—what you see with the eye and what is happening underneath the surface. Here, beneath the surface, beneath the activity of men, animals and machines, beneath the shouting and confusion, was order and system. Here was wheat steadily and quietly flowing from the field to the bin, ready to go out to feed the people of the world.

I could not remain very long, as my time for dallying

was limited, but even those few minutes in the fields were sufficient to make me realize how different these operations were from those that existed in England. Here the grain was not gathered into barns; its very bulk made the providing of such shelter impossible, and time, too, would not permit of such a method. Instead, it was threshed direct from the stook, just as I had watched it done, into bins, and from the bins, I soon learned, it was hauled as quickly as possible after threshing to the local elevator at Fenn for sale.

That first season the price for wheat and other grains was extraordinarily high. That is, at the beginning of the season Bob Sutfin, for instance, by threshing his own grain first and hauling it at once to town, sold it at the peak of the price, actually realizing in the neighborhood of three dollars a bushel for it, a dollar more than we received for ours when we sold it a few weeks later. Such were the vagaries of ordinary grain farming in the early post-war years.

This experience set us to thinking. We felt that we wanted to do something a little more profitable than ordinary grain farming, something in which we could use such brains as we might possess as well as our brawn to better advantage.

During our residence in California we had heard quite a bit about the superiority of northern-grown seed. After a little investigation we discovered that seed grain, grown in Canada, was of splendid quality and received a substantial premium over and above the market price for

ordinary grain. For specially good seed, it appeared, one could ask one's own price—and get it, too.

We determined to spend the forthcoming winter making a close and intensive study of all angles of this work, and to make definite plans for entering the registered seed business the very next spring.



Nine

Once or twice, since our arrival, I had been driven by one of the men to Big Valley. Big Valley was only nine miles away and it did not take very long to go in with a good team. Besides, we had to go there for our coal.

Big Valley had three coal mines at that time; all of them working full blast. The biggest one was on the road by which we came into town. Downward sloping tunnels or drifts were bored into the low hills and loaded trucks could be seen constantly coming up from the dark tunnels, to be reloaded into waiting railroad trucks near-by.

Just about this time a most exciting strike occurred at this mine. It became so bad, indeed, that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had to be called down from Edmonton to quell it, and machine guns had to be used occasionally to keep the strikers in hand. A few people were killed. Even the mine women joined in the fray, hurling pails of manure and other filthy refuse at the police and any townspeople who dared to venture too near. Of course, during those days we were warned to

keep away, and it was a good thing that the strike happened in summertime, when coal was not badly needed.

One fall day, however, with a hint of winter in the air, I decided to take a wagon into Big Valley and bring back a load of coal for the farm myself. I had already driven a team several times. I had hauled lumber successfully from Fenn. So I felt confident that I could haul a load of coal.

I arrived at the mine without mishap. To obtain a load of coal you had to drive your wagon first onto a platform and have it weighed empty. Then you drove along a little farther and pulled up beneath the coal chute. A man standing at the bottom of the chute operated a trap-door that released the coal. As soon as your wagon was filled with coal, you drove back to the weighing platform and had your wagon weighed again. The amount of coal was easily ascertained by deducting the weight of the empty wagon, previously recorded, from the total weight now registered.

On this particular occasion I drove safely onto the platform, climbed down and held my horses while my wagon was weighed; then proceeded to pull up underneath the chute. I remained on the seat while the wagon was being loaded and held on to the horses. Soon the box was full and I signalled to the man to close the trap. For some reason or other, the trap refused to close, and the coal kept pouring down. In the excitement of the moment I did not have the sense to pull ahead, but just sat there, watching the coal pour down on to my already over-full

wagon. Suddenly an extra large lump of coal came down the chute, bounced off the wagon, and struck the rump of one of the horses. The horses jumped forward, broke the wagon pole, and almost threw me from my perch. There might have been a serious runaway had not several miners sprung forward and seized the horses' heads.

After a lot of trouble the trap was fixed, the chute closed, and no more coal came down. It took considerable time to shovel off the excess coal from my wagon and clear away the heap that had piled up on the ground around me. I also had to get my wagon pole repaired and the harness fixed. I listened to some of the most expressive and colourful language I have ever heard in my life while all this was being done.

It was not until I was well on my homeward way, however, that I remembered one thing. I had carefully stepped off the wagon while it was being weighed empty, but I had forgotten to do so while it had been weighed full. So I had actually weighed myself in with the load, and paid for my own weight at the rate of about one-tenth of a cent a pound.

Big Valley boasted one broad main street, which lead from the railway depot up to the Anglican Church. On either side of it was a board walk with hitching posts alongside, and store buildings with galvanized iron, painted wood or brick veneer fronts. Near the station was a fairly good-sized and quite comfortable hotel. There were two pool rooms, above one of which was a

fine dance hall with a well-sprung floor; there were two lumber yards, two schools, a blacksmith's shop, one or two churches, and several garages. There were also three Chinese restaurants, with laundries attached, and one white restaurant. There were two main department stores and several small ones, a butcher shop, a bakery, a tailor shop, and so forth. In fact, something of everything.

The residential part of Big Valley consisted of a number of frame houses to north and south of the main street. They housed Big Valley's three hundred odd inhabitants, for the most part miners and railwaymen and their families. There was one street, upon the hillside, near the high school, that boasted some really pretentious homes. This was familiarly known as "Millionaire Row."

Big Valley was a divisional railroad centre in those days and boasted a "round house" that afforded a good deal of repair work. It was a thriving, busy little place, eager to go ahead, quite colourful and, to my eyes at any rate, quite romantic. When I saw cowboys riding on the streets, in gaudy shirts, shaggy chaps, and broad sombreros, I thought myself in the real West indeed.

We made some very fine friends in Big Valley, among all classes of people. I very quickly learned one thing—that it is what people are, and not what they do, that matters. Perhaps I had been just a little bit snobbish when I first arrived—we are brought up that way in England—but I soon got over it. Our friends included the pro-

fessional, business and working people, and we found many of them to be worth their weight in gold.

I shall never forget my little Chinese friend, Joe Eng, proprietor of Big Valley's nicest restaurant and laundry, not forgetting, too, his capable assistant in the kitchen, Louis, the cook.

Our family, including the hired men, patronized Joe Eng's restaurant during all the years that we lived at Fenn. I remember, when my second baby was born, I proudly took it in and exhibited it to Joe.

"Nice baby," Joe remarked, beamingly. "Little boy, eh?"

"No, little girl," I corrected.

Joe shook his head. "Girl no good," he remarked finally.

A few years later, when my boy was born, I took him in for Joe's approval.

"A boy, Joe," I said, proudly.

"Ah," Joe exclaimed, and this time the smile was as broad as it was long. "You good wife now. Everything all light."

Joe was always very kind to us. He even used to mind my babies for me sometimes, when I came in to the Big Valley dances. I'd park them with him and feel quite assured that they would be well looked after.

Some of my very happiest memories of farming days are linked with Big Valley. Fun there on Fair Days, when our own boys took part and sometimes carried off the lion's share of the prizes; baseball games at which I

"rooted" as loudly as any one for the town; house parties and jolly public dances, where young and old joined in merriment such as I have seldom seen equalled in the city either before or since. Dear, gallant little Big Valley! It has since faced a succession of disasters. First the coal mines were closed down, then the divisional point was changed; many of its people went away; several of its houses were moved out. Now it is a very desolate-looking little place indeed. But it still retains its Western spirit. It still hopes and believes it will "come back."

Stettler, on the other hand, was, and still is, a really beautiful little town, and a comparatively prosperous one. Stettler was originally built on a flat and treeless piece of prairie. It was burned down shortly after it was first built, and then rebuilt. Many of its early settlers, having come from the Old Country and from parts of Ontario that had been abundantly blessed with natural forestry, had quickly realized the drawback of the town's lack of natural tree growth, and had set themselves to overcome this.

In 1907 a particularly enterprising mayor thought up a novel scheme to beautify the town. He promised a rebate of fifteen per cent off the taxes of every one who would plant trees around their houses and care for them. The bonus continued until 1915, and during that time many hundreds of trees were planted and successfully raised. The Town Council, too, taking an example from its individual residents, commenced to plant trees along the sidewalks. Poplars, Balm of Gileads, and later Russian

poplars, willows and spruce trees were all successfully grown, and the consequence was that in a few years the town presented a wealth of foliage and beauty. (It was not until much later that Mr. McGillivray confessed that he had raised the taxes fifteen per cent to take care of the bonus!)

Stettler was a larger and smarter Big Valley, with somewhat better stores, bigger buildings, more pretentious houses. I soon made some very fine friends there, too. One of the first people I met in Stettler, and one who will always be associated in my mind with pioneering days and pioneering people, was Judge Gray, once familiarly and affectionately known to his friends as "Buckskin Billy." Here was a character indeed.

The circumstances in which I first came into contact with Judge Gray had to do with a man working for us who had given us some trouble. One day, in the middle of harvesting, while my husband was away from the farm, he had suddenly given up his job. His excuse was that his girl friend had called to see him during the afternoon and no one had sent word up to the fields that she was there. He was very insolent to me at the supper table and said he would leave first thing in the morning.

"All right," I said. "I will find a man to replace you." Which I immediately did.

The following morning, having slept off his grievance, and probably thinking better of his rash act in throwing up a good job, he came to me and said he had changed his mind and would stay on.

"You can't do that," I said. "I have another man coming."

At that he became so abusive that I finally had to call a policeman in from Big Valley to get him off the place. He went, vowing dire vengeance on the Strange family.

He kept his word, too. A short time later he summoned us for having fired him, as he claimed, without good reason. He also claimed that he had been two weeks without work and he wanted wages for that period and all his expenses into the bargain.

Of course, in the first place he hadn't been fired at all. And even if he had been, the fact that I had done the firing would not have held good in law, as he had been hired by my husband and could only be fired by him.

The case came up before Judge Gray. My husband, acting in his own defence, simply tied the man up into verbal knots, making him contradict himself time and time again.

It was my first appearance in a court room and I was very interested and amused at all that went on. However, my indignation got the better of me when the man stated that I had said to him: "You're fired. Get out!" It was such a bold-faced falsehood that I stood up and exclaimed: "That's a lie!"

Judge Gray regarded me sternly from above his spectacles.

"Remove that young woman from the court room," he ordered.

An apologetic but smiling policeman immediately

tapped me on the shoulder and escorted me from the room. ✓

Despite this, Judge Gray and I soon became the very firmest of friends, and we are such to this day. Every time I went into Stettler I made a point of calling at his little office on Main Street, where one could usually find him sitting at his desk, or chatting to his friends—a little, grizzled old man, with a short reddish beard and kindly blue eyes, even then well on in his seventies, but hale and hearty and possessed of a quick and ready wit that few people ever got the better of.

Judge Gray held, and still holds, a variety of professional positions. He was Justice of the Peace, registrar and notary public, insurance agent, official auditor, agent for the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Hudson's Bay Company lands, fur farmer and so forth. In a less professional capacity he was counsellor, advisor, and kind friend to scores of newcomers to the West, and to a host of people both old and young.

There was one side of Billy Gray that I came to know better as time went on and our friendship ripened. This was his extraordinary love and understanding of wild life and his ability as a naturalist and collector.

His house, which stood on the outskirts of town, was literally packed, from basement to roof, with souvenirs of the things that had interested him during his long and varied career. One was always welcome at Judge Gray's house, and he would proudly escort you from room to room telling you, in his own inimitable fashion, the de-

tails and history of each and every souvenir. Each one was dear and precious to him, not because of any intrinsic value that it might possess, but because of the intimate associations he cherished concerning it and which he took a keen pleasure in recalling for the interest and enlightenment of his many visitors.

Hanging on the walls were fine heads of moose, elk, wild goat and deer. There was a specimen of almost every species of Canadian bird. There were collections of fresh and salt water shells, of coins and of guns and ancient war implements. Most of his Indian things had been presented to him by Chiefs of the Blackfoot and Blood tribes, who had been his friends in days gone by. There were marvellous breech clouts and necklaces made from antelope shin bones, rubbed and polished until they appeared like fine old ivory. There were also many fine specimens of bead work, buffalo arrows, and pemmican hammers.

Many a time I have stood in his living-room and looked at the pictures that lined the walls—pictures of men and women who helped to blaze the trail that we newcomers were trying so hard to follow; pictures of the old homesteads that were the first rude abiding places of the staunch-hearted men and women who came to a land that was still the hunting ground of the buffalo and the Indian; of the cities of Edmonton and Calgary as they were, or rather were not, more than half a century before.

Many a time, too, I have sat, almost literally at his feet, and listened to his fascinating stories of those pioneer

days—stories which, to my mind, should not be allowed to go unrecorded and unsung in the historic annals of our Western country. It is my own hope, indeed, some day to record them.

He used to tell me, for instance, of the time when he first landed in Calgary in the midsummer of 1886. He had come out with his young wife from England with the intention of buying a ranch.

Soon after he landed there a very polite gentleman called on him and told him he knew of something extraordinarily good. For this information Judge Gray paid him an honorarium of fifty dollars.

The newcomer was driven out to see the place, which to his inexperienced eyes looked very good indeed. So he returned to Calgary, filed a claim to it at the Land Office, and then went and purchased a complete outfit of machinery and implements and ordered lumber for a house. He also hired a carpenter, "at so much a minute," to build the house.

Just as everything was getting well under way a man appeared on the scene and demanded to know just what he was doing on his, the stranger's, land.

Judge Gray explained that he had homesteaded the land and had paid a man fifty dollars for locating it for him.

"Then you've been duped," the man said, "like many another green Englishman. This is my place. Yours is six miles away."

So it was found to be. The Judge had to move all his

stuff over to the proper place, which turned out to be composed of rocks and stones and not worth ten cents an acre. Finally he was able to dispose of it and to acquire a better piece of land.

"I was indeed one of many," Judge Gray admitted, with a smile. "It was said to be the daily prayer among the real estate men of that time: 'O Lord, give us this day our daily Englishman!'"

There was quite a bit of horse rustling going on in the early days and a lot of the best cattle found its way across the line. In an endeavour to stop this sort of thing, a number of men banded themselves together into a sort of organization, known as the Vigilantes. Members were stationed about the prairies to watch for the thieves.

One day a party of Vigilantes, it is told, were riding across the plains when they came upon a gang of rustlers just making off with some choice cattle. They rounded up the thieves and strung them all up on the nearest trees. Imagine their consternation, however, to find that in the excitement they had hung one of their own Vigilantes by mistake!

Two of the Vigilantes, knowing that the man had a wife, offered to go and break the sad news to her. One was a very tall chap called Slim; the other was a little fellow known as Shorty. These two set out for the man's shack to inform the widow.

"Is there anything we can do for you?" Slim asked, anxious to make amends. "We'd even be willing to marry you, if that would help any."

The widow considered for a moment, eyeing the two of them with businesslike mien.

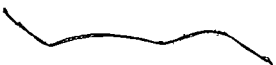
"It's a good idea," she said at last. "I'll take the long one."

Judge Gray's account of his second honeymoon, I think, is one of the funniest stories of all. He was running a trading post at Cochrane when he met his second wife. One day, while gathering up some cattle for marketing purposes, he espied upon the plains a runaway horse. On roping it he recognized it as belonging to one of the prairie belles of the district, who had evidently been thrown. He took the horse, found the dismounted rider, and escorted her home.

The acquaintance ripened rapidly and soon the pair decided to get wed. As the minister was due almost immediately on his monthly round, there was no time to get a wedding ring. They used a curtain ring instead.

The honeymoon was to be spent at a cow camp in the Rockies, many miles from civilization. They set out for it armed with provisions and with equipment to last several weeks. They imagined that they would be able to enjoy peace and quietude to their heart's content.

What was their consternation, then, on retiring the first night, to hear a great commotion outside the door of their cabin. They thought for a moment that another Indian rebellion had taken place. On opening the door, however, they found a mob of some twenty cowboys, who had followed them to their retreat and were bent on having some fun.

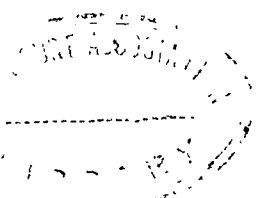


The boys had brought with them a variety of wedding gifts. Among them were an eight-day clock, several frying pans and other cooking utensils, a milk cow and churn, a side of bacon, and, what was a most unusual luxury in those days, an arm chair.

They had also brought with them the inevitable keg of whiskey, numerous boxes of cigars, and several packs of cards and fiddles.

The boys remained until all the whiskey was consumed and all the provisions eaten up. Then the entire party, including the bride and groom, who had no food left, had to return to town for more.

After that the interrupted honeymoon was resumed and permitted to run its course in peace.



Ten

During the early months of fall the weather continued mild, a protracted Indian summer, with bright but perceptibly shortening days and a landscape that fairly rioted in changing hues of red and brown and gold.

At night it would freeze a little, a few degrees more each passing day. Leaves began to fall from the trees, slowly at first, then more rapidly, until soon the whole land was carpeted with a soft layer of them withered and brown.

The snow was late in coming. Once or twice we had light flurries that peppered the countryside with softest white, but these flurries were usually of brief duration and the flakes melted quickly under the influence of the still warm mid-day sun.

I was told that when the real winter snow came it would continue to fall heavily for many days, perhaps even turn into one of those blinding blizzards of which one heard with some apprehension. It would then remain, like a hard white carpet, packed down anywhere from two to four feet thick, until the following spring.

Work was over now—that is, the heavy part of it—and we at last had time to think of things other than alarm clocks, long hours in the fields, and over-abundant meals.

Fall, I discovered, was chiefly important on account of the fact that the hunting season came then. Our boys, and a good many of the men folk on the farms, soon began to take time off to go out after ducks and prairie chickens and the Hungarian partridge and wild geese with which our district liberally abounded.

At first I cherished the idea that by shooting these birds and using them on our table, we would be able to save on the food bills. But it was not long before I discovered that the cost of guns and shells, and the wear and tear on clothing and footwear, far outcost the saving. However, the hunters derived a great deal of fun out of it all and we enjoyed many a delicious meal.

Some very funny incidents happened in connection with those early hunting expeditions.

Harry had once been on a turkey hunt in the United States. One day, driving along a trail on his way home to our farm, he saw a large bunch of what he took to be wild turkeys in a field. He immediately leaped from the rig, tied his team to a fence post, and went after the birds with his gun.

The turkeys all made off, however, and he returned to his team without having captured one. When he arrived at the spot where he had left the rig, he found that it was no longer there. The horses had broken loose from the fence and had made off down the trail. He eventually

found them in a brush patch near the house of a farmer a little way off.

As Harry was extracting the buggy from the brush, the farmer came up to him and asked him what had happened.

"Oh, I tied them up while I went after some wild turkeys in a field back there," Harry explained.

"Wild turkeys, my eye!" the farmer cried. "That is my wife's purebred flock. It is a good thing for you, my friend, that you didn't shoot any."

Geese, apparently, were the hardest birds of all to bag. Our boys went out after them time and time again and seldom had any luck, although some of our more skillful neighbours frequently bagged them. In fact, I only remember eating goose but once on the farm, and that one was captured in a peculiar fashion.

The boys had gone out very early one morning with a party of young friends down to Ewing Lake. They had already prepared the special "pits" in which to conceal themselves. On taking up their positions they found to their surprise that a flock of geese had already alighted and were calmly feeding on the field.

They at once began shooting at them and shot several without any trouble at all. But just as they were about to gather up their spoils, a strange man came hurrying over from a patch of brush, in which he had apparently been concealed, and started shouting at them angrily.

"How dare you shoot my geese!" he cried.

"Your geese!" exclaimed one of the lads. "What d'you mean?"

"Can't you see that they're decoys?" the hunter demanded.

The boys took another look, and sure enough, each bird had been tied down by its foot to a stake stuck in the ground. They had shot a bunch of live decoys.

They stared at each other in consternation. Now they had stepped into some serious trouble indeed.

Just at that moment, however, the owner of the land on which they were hunting appeared on the scene. Fortunately he happened to be the father of a friend of one of them.

"What's happening here?" he asked, glancing from the boys to the geese. Turning to the stranger, he inquired, "What are you doing on my land?"

The stranger looked somewhat abashed and stammered something in reply.

"And what's more," the farmer went on, "show me your licence for owning wild geese!"

"If you'll say nothing about it all, you can have the geese," the hunter offered, in a conciliatory tone.

The farmer grinned, turned the birds, all but one, over to the boys to divide among them, and let them all go. That night we feasted on wild goose for the first time.

Among the women, the fall, I discovered, was chiefly a time for the enjoyment of social activities—activities in

which all members of the community, regardless of nationality, joined.

Ours was a particularly fine district, so far as people were concerned. I should like to mention all of my good neighbours by name; they were each and every one of them interesting to me in a variety of different ways, because of where they had come from, for instance; because of the things they had been and done before they had come farming; and for what they felt about Canada.

There were a few Scotch, English and Americans, but most of them were of good old farming stock and had come from Bruce County, Ontario. A large proportion, however,—living “back in the hills,” as we called the district between our place and the Red Deer River—were from Central Europe. Among them were French, Germans, Dutch, Swedes, Norwegians, Russians, Finlanders, Poles and even one Chinese—a conglomerate of races that merged and mingled surprisingly well when one considered their widely divergent racial characteristics and traits. One could still go into homes where the people lived in exactly the same fashion as they had done in Europe, but their children, for the most part, were being quite thoroughly assimilated and were, it seemed to me, contributing something definitely valuable to the future welfare and culture of Western Canada.

The Leggs and the Ewings were the two oldest-established families in the community, I believe; certainly they were the most important and for many years they more or less reigned supreme. They had come from

Ontario in the old pioneering days and had endured the hardships and problems of that earlier period; they had built up large families and fine homes.

The old Legg place was then, and still is, a sort of landmark on the road between our farm and Fenn. It was a much-built-on-to frame edifice, always well-painted and in good repair. It had started as a small, two-story house—probably with two rooms upstairs and one large room down. Then, as the family had grown, it had pushed out into a commodious ell. A lean-to had next been added at the back and another at one side. So many farm homes in the West seem to have “grown” in this fashion—some of them from the nucleus of a tiny shack.

The Ewing home was some distance north up the lake, almost out of our community, but the two families were united by ties of blood and marriage, and so they were always looked upon as belonging to us.

A fine Scotch family, with whom we soon became very firm friends, were the Wallaces. The Wallace farm lay just a mile or so from the railroad, a little west of Fenn—a really choice location. The two brothers, Daniel and Robert, had come out with their father and mother years before. Dan had been an artist-photographer in Paris; Bob had been a sailor. He had also fought with the Canadians all through the Great War. They, too, had started with a shack. But by dint of careful farming and even more careful saving, they had built up a fine holding and a fine home. After the old people died, Dan and Bob married English girls—two sisters—who had also

lived in the district for many years, Rose as Stettler business woman and Gladys as country school teacher.

They became among our firmest friends. I loved to go to their home. It was, indeed, one of the most pretentious, yet at the same time one of the most "homey" places in the community. Dan had painted the walls himself, stencilling them most artistically. That house, apart from the kitchen, with its inevitable cream separator and other farming-chore paraphernalia and its utter lack of city conveniences, might have been the home of any well-to-do city dweller.

In our district, people did not have luxuries in their homes; they did not have conveniences such as city people know them, but they managed to live decently and well.

Another fine neighbour, Mrs. Awe, also Scotch, once played good Samaritan to me when I was unexpectedly ill. She came over every day and nursed me, remaining with me all day long, at the cost of her own household activities, for several days, and then refused to take a cent for her services. Of such stuff are farm women made.

The basis of community life in our district seemed to lie in the local branch of the organization known as the United Farmers of Alberta, or more familiarly, the U.F.A. Up until about 1915, I learned, women had been admitted into this organization on a basis of equality with the men, and many able women had availed themselves of the opportunity of thus taking part in public affairs and of attempting to solve economic problems confronting the

farmer—problems which affected the farm wife equally with her husband.

As the organization grew, however, the women found that there was much specialized work for them to do, and thus they formed the separate organization known as the United Farm Women of Alberta. (There is that equally worthy women's organization known as the Women's Institute in Alberta, though there was not one in our particular district.) Out of the meetings of these rural women has developed an ever-widening influence for good, evident in better rural schools, municipal hospitals, public health nurses, travelling dentists, libraries, rest rooms, community halls and so forth.

At the first meeting I attended of our local Auger branch of the U.F.W.A., I was amazed at the keen business acumen displayed by the women present, many of whom had never had much executive experience outside their own homes. They conducted their meetings on businesslike lines. Sometimes they brought in a speaker from the city to discourse on such subjects as cooking, canning, nursing or dressmaking. Sometimes one of their own number would take up some subject and give a talk on it. And well-equipped many of them were to do this. There were many former nurses, teachers and business women among them. Sometimes the meeting would take the form of a sewing bee or a quilting bee, and once I remember a particularly enjoyable "church barn painting bee," at which we women all wielded brushes and in between times enjoyed an excellent picnic

luncheon. More often than not, however, the meeting would merely take the form of a friendly social gathering at some farm woman's home, the hostess serving an elaborate "lunch" to her always appreciative guests.

Another interesting event of that first fall was a prairie wedding which we attended. Rumours of it had been going around the countryside for some time. At last the date was set. Although we received no "official" invitation, we were assured by our neighbours that we would be expected to go to the church and would be welcome as guests.

The bride was the daughter of a real old-timer; the bridegroom the son of another. Both of them had been brought up and educated in our community. They were known to every one, young and old, for miles around. Naturally it was anticipated that the wedding would be a very big affair.

The ceremony was to take place in our little Lakeview Church which was about three miles away from our place. It stood on a piece of land that had been donated by an old-timer, Mr. Lockwood, and it was used by all denominations excepting the Roman Catholics, who had a building of their own. The Anglicans, for instance, had it in the morning for their service; the United Church people used it in the afternoon. Both Anglicans and United people attended and enjoyed each other's service. There was little or no religious strife between any of the different sects. In fact, it seemed to me that all saw the necessity of "pulling together" for the common good.

The unfortunate ministers both had to come from Stettler, more than twenty miles away, to take the services. In those early days of ours they used buggies or rode horseback in summer and in winter travelled in cutters or sleighs. It was not until many years later, when better times came along, that the Anglicans presented their minister with a car, a gift which not only facilitated his work but also brought him and his family a well-merited opportunity for some pleasure and recreation. The United Church soon followed suit, and today both ministers are able to get about the countryside in comparative ease and comfort.

What a lot of courage it must have taken to make those long, weary drives. In winter, snow would be piled in great heavy drifts along the trails; sometimes a blizzard might be blowing and the temperature drop to twenty, thirty and even forty below zero.

A minister I knew well had his feet badly frozen one year and almost lost them, and it was no uncommon occurrence to have ears, cheeks and noses frozen several times during one cold season. One minister tried to solve the problem by carrying along with him a bottle of the "something that cheers." It solved the problem all right. A parishioner found the bottle one Sunday hidden under the blankets in his cutter. The result was peremptory dismissal!

I don't doubt but that it must have been equally unpleasant in the summer, too, what with the heat, the flies, and the mosquitoes.

Yes indeed, the minister's life was a thankless one in many ways. The congregations, at best, were usually pretty small. The stipends were negligible. Yet the men who undertook this work never seemed to falter. They kept the doors of their churches open, the lamps trimmed and burning, to light the path of those they hoped would one day be recalled by the force of patience and love.

I am afraid we ourselves were not very regular churchgoers. I had been brought up an orthodox Anglican; so had Harry. We both enjoyed our Anglican service. But on the farm it was often so very hard to get to church, even when one was so minded. Farm people have their chores to do on a Sunday the same as usual. And it must be confessed that Sunday is a day when every one gets up feeling a bit lazy and disinclined for work. After all, it *is* Sunday. In our own house it was always a difficult business to get the men out of bed at an early enough hour so that the cows and chickens and horses would not suffer. When these duties were done, the men had to be fed, and for once they could linger over breakfast. After that I had to get myself and my family ready in good time to drive the three miles and be at church by eleven o'clock. Our spirits were willing but our flesh was often weak.

On one of the few occasions when we put in an appearance en masse during those early days, a rather disconcerting thing happened. Eleven o'clock came and passed without the arrival of the minister. We waited and waited, but still he did not appear. Finally, deciding that he must have had a breakdown, one of the congrega-

tion announced that we would hold the service without him.

We sang a hymn or two, some prayers were read, and the appropriate lessons for the day. Then the moment arrived for the sermon. Looking around, the warden who was conducting the service espied my husband.

"Ah," he said, "I see that Major Strange is with us for once. I am going to ask *him* to preach the sermon for us."

Now I had already discovered that my husband is a man who is never at a loss for words, on any subject, anywhere. But this was the first time, so far as I knew, that he had ever faced a rural audience and been asked to talk on a religious topic. I wondered what he would do. Would he be nonplussed?

Not a bit of it. Without any hesitation he rose to his feet, marched up to the platform, and faced the people.

"I shall take for my text," he began, "the well-known line, 'Do unto others as ye would be done by.'"

And he proceeded to launch forth into one of the finest talks on the subject I have ever listened to. I doubt if any better sermon had ever been preached in that little church before, or ever will be again.

On the occasion of the wedding of which I speak, every one from far and near was crowded into our little church for the event. Even the school children had been given a holiday so that they might attend.

We could not hear much of the actual service. There was a continual whispering and shuffling of feet, and

some of the smaller children had to be forcibly restrained from walking right up to the platform to get a better view of the proceedings.

At the end of the service, instead of turning and kissing his bride, as we had expected him to do, the bridegroom suddenly made a dash for the door.

For a moment I had the uncomfortable thought that he was going to make off without his bride. Fortunately no such calamity occurred, and soon we were rewarded with the explanation of this unexpected conduct. It appeared that the bridegroom had suddenly espied gasoline escaping from his car, which was standing outside the open door, and had rushed out to see what was the matter. One of the youths of the district had conceived the idea of emptying the tank as a practical joke, but the bridegroom caught him in time and the consequent delay that would have ensued was thus avoided.

Usually it is the custom in the country to "shivaree" the newly wedded pair. Boys and girls, and even men and women, come from far and near at night, bearing pots and pans and other noise-makers, upon which they pound outside the house where the bride and groom are staying, and do not stop until they come forth and invite them in. After this, refreshments and merry-making are indulged in until morning breaks.

There was to be no "shivaree" on this occasion, however, since the young couple were leaving almost immediately for an extended honeymoon at the Pacific Coast. We all followed them to Fenn, honking horns and blowing

whistles. Amid a veritable deluge of rice and paper confetti, they clambered aboard the train, the husband unconsciously bearing a goodly sized placard on his back, significantly decorated with the words:

"We are just married. Please take care of us."

I have no doubt but that the amused passengers took good care of them, all right.



Eleven

The first big social event of the winter season was the production of a play. This entertainment, which was sponsored by the women of the U.F.W.A., was for the purpose of raising funds to purchase a community piano to be installed in the school house, where all social activities of the community took place. The play itself was a simple but exceedingly humorous dialogue, presenting a Ladies Aid meeting of a decade or more before, and there were so many characters in it that practically every woman in the district had a part.

The little offering was admirably staged and presented. We all made our own costumes. There were dresses and hats resurrected from old trunks and boxes belonging to a generation ago, some of them very funny indeed. As for the acting, one could have gone into much more experienced dramatic circles and have fared far worse.

At the conclusion of the play, a sumptuous lunch was served and people sat around in groups and chatted. All at once some one suggested that the chairs be pushed aside and that we dance. That seemed to me to be a very good

idea and I heartily endorsed it. What was my surprise when the lady sitting next to me turned on me in high indignation and remarked reprovingly:

"There will certainly be no dance in this school house tonight."

"Why not?" I asked, somewhat bewilderedly.

"Because we don't allow dancing in this community."

"You don't allow dancing?" I echoed, incredulously.

"No!" she snapped. "So don't get any ideas into your head that *you're* going to change us to city ways!"

I felt properly squashed, and said no more on that occasion. I must confess, however, that I was literally amazed to discover, as I did shortly afterwards, that in our own particular district a small group of disapproving people had sufficient power to prevent a large body of people from doing what they wanted to, not only as regards dancing but other things as well.

It appeared that Fenn had been passing through a sort of "uplift" phase at the time of our arrival. In the olden days people had been very fond of dancing. I heard stories, afterwards, of dances at which Indians and half-breeds joined with the whites, to dance not only all night long but for days and nights at a time. Some of the old-timers remembered those dances, half-ashamedly in front of their womenfolk, to be sure, but none the less with evident relish and regret.

They must have been good old times—even if they were a bit uproarious and undignified—for, after all, it must be remembered that those old folk dances, in which the

early pioneers indulged so enthusiastically, expressed the art and folk lore of many different nationalities.

Our own community, or rather the small but strong disapproving faction in it, had gone so far in their efforts to suppress the probably sometimes unrestrained dances of earlier days that now there was no dancing allowed at all.

On this particular occasion of which I write, however, there seemed to be a new and determined effort abroad among some of the younger folk to break down the barriers which had been so far successfully set up, and to rebel openly against the stern dictates of their elders.

Gradually the gathering split up into two groups—one for and one against the holding of a dance. People who had been friends and neighbours for many years surprisingly took sides against each other. Arguments waxed fast and furious. Fists were shaken in angry faces. Many unflattering remarks were passed and some quite caustic personalities indulged in. The room began to resemble a sort of verbal battle-field.

One jolly woman, who seemed to possess decidedly broad-minded tendencies, became so exasperated that she climbed up on to the platform and defiantly performed a Highland Fling. (Curiously enough, a few weeks later this same lady met with a rather serious accident when driving home from a dance in another community. Her team ran away in the dark and overturned the buggy in which she and her family were riding, right at the very door of one of her keenest opponents on the subject of

dancing. "It looked," they said afterwards, "like a judgment of God." She was carried into the farmhouse and was forced to spend several days in bed there with a badly sprained ankle and other injuries, all the time being waited on in most kindly fashion by one of the people she had so deeply offended. However she did recover and did dance again.)

After the argument had lasted for about an hour, the would-be dancers admitted defeat and gave in. The party broke up and we all went home, and it was quite a long time before some of those people spoke to each other again.

The incident turned out to be the thin end of the wedge, however. It was the last triumph of the non-dancers. Almost from that very night the tide began to turn and dancing once more began to come into its own.

There is no doubt but that old Mr. Lockwood had a good deal to do with it. Mr. Lockwood, with his ruddy face and fringe of white hair—a veritable character out of Dickens—was a bit crochety on the surface but underneath was blessed with a keen sense of humour and a generous and hospitable spirit. It was Mr. Lockwood who, realizing the disappointment of the young people on the night of the concert, and remembering his own young days, offered his house to be used for the holding of a dance, whenever they might like to plan for it. He was eagerly "taken up" on the invitation and very soon the date of the dance was announced and those of us who were not bothered by any scruples concerning this form

of amusement and recreation turned out in full force to enjoy it.

This, the first country dance I had ever been to, afforded me not only a great deal of personal pleasure but a good deal of interest as well.

When we arrived at Mr. Lockwood's house we found that the living-room had been entirely cleared of furniture—even the big heating stove in the centre had been removed—and in its place benches had been arranged against the walls. On one side of the room sat the men, on the other the women.

The music was supplied by two brothers, one of whom played a fiddle, the other a guitar. They played all the old tunes, known and beloved of a generation before. The music was remarkably good, too; lots of rhythm and well-kept time.

The programme did not include any modern dances other than the waltz and the one-step, and both of these were performed in a style that had long since gone out in the city. In addition to these were two-steps, seven-steps, polkas and barn dances, one following the other with hardly breathing space for either players or dancers. Most popular of all, however, was what was known as the Square Dance.

This square dance is somewhat reminiscent of the English Lancers, and the Sir Roger de Coverly, though different in that the various figures are sung or "called" by an individual who is known as the "caller."

In the olden days the calling used to be done by the

fiddler, who walked among the dancers as he played the jigs and hornpipes that mainly comprised the music.

The words of the rhymes give the instructions for the various figures of the dance, so that even those who know nothing whatever about a square dance can soon fall into line and perform it quite creditably. Many of these old rhymes, unfortunately, are dying out as the old-time fiddlers, one by one, pass away. Some of the best of them have never been committed to the printed page, but have merely been handed down by word of mouth alone. With the gradual encroachment of the modern dances into the country school rooms, the old-time fiddler, who cannot play the new melodies but who could play the old ones irresistibly, is being ousted more and more into the limbo of forgotten things, his delightful melodies and intriguing rhymes with him.

Some of the verses that accompany the square dances have an almost Chaucerian flavour and are well worth preserving, not alone because of any literary merit they may possess but because they are an integral part of the record of a pioneer people.

To the tune of *A Life on the Ocean Wave*, for example, go the following words:

*"Head two gents cross over,
And leave your partners stand,
And side two gents cross over,
And do as I command.
Honour on the corners,*

*Honour your partners all,
Swing the corner lady,
And promenade the hall."*

And here is another:

*"Balance your partners, one and all,
And grand right and left around the hall,
Promenade round in single file,
Gent in the lead in the Injun style.
Ladies bow low and the gents bow under,
Couple up tight and swing like thunder.*

*"Lady round the gent and the gent goes so,
And the lady round the gent and the gent don't go.
Leave the lady and home you go,
Opposite the gent with a do-se-do.
Jump right up and never come down,
And swing that calico round and round."*

And swing they do, with a gusto and an abandon that warms your heart.

There are usually four couples to each square in a square dance, and there may be as many squares as the room will hold. The characteristic step is a springy, walking step, the chassé or two-step, and much pivoting on the corners.

In almost every case there is a constant repetition of both music and theme, and the progressive element gives a delightful social quality to the dance, since each couple

progresses to a new position in each repetition of the figure, dancing with a different couple every time.

At this first dance we did not know half the people present, but no one seemed to think it necessary to introduce us. I concluded that it was the custom to dance with any one who asked you, rather than refuse on the plea of not knowing him, and thus incur, perhaps, the reputation of being a bit conceited.

Not many of the men present were good dancers from my city point of view, but I must say that they were enthusiastic and expert exponents of the old-fashioned measures. However, I did presently find myself in the arms of a young man (to whom I had not been introduced and who was a complete stranger to me) who appeared to be quite modern in his interpretation of the dances. In fact, I quite enjoyed dancing with him, and told him so.

"I go often to the city," he told me in broken English. Then, to my consternation, he added, "You nice dancer, too, Miss. We dance together all the time, eh?"

I had to explain to him that this would be quite impossible, since I was a newcomer to the district and my husband was present. Despite this, he pursued me throughout the evening, and I had quite a time evading him and maintaining my reputation. I did not want to be considered stand-offish but on the other hand I did not want people to think that I distributed favours too liberally among the unknown.

The dance did not break up until the small hours of the morning, when we reluctantly dispersed, tired but

thoroughly satisfied with the abundant and generous and, to me, novel hospitality extended by our genial host.

Another very popular form of entertainment about the countryside was the Box Social. We had one about a month after the concert. This time it was to raise funds for the installation of hot-lunch equipment in the school.

I was told to bring with me a box in which I had packed a lunch sufficient for two people, and to decorate the box as prettily as I could. My name, on a slip of paper, was to be placed inside. Otherwise there were to be no identifying marks.

The school house was crowded as usual, this time, however, with a preponderance of young men.

On the platform was a table, and on this table were arranged the huge pile of boxes to be sold. Some of them were extraordinarily ingenious. They were fashioned of crêpe paper and bits of silk and ribbon, and some of them were decorated to represent such things as ships, log cabins, baskets of flowers, bird cages, railroad engines, dolls' houses, and so forth.

When we were all seated, a jovial person mounted the platform and announced that the auction would begin. Picking up a confection of ribbon and crêpe, he cried:

"Now, here's a bee-u-ti-ful box, gents! I bet there's a swell piece of pie in this one! Who says a dollar for it?"

No one said a dollar, but a deep voice at the back of the room ventured: "Twenty-five cents, mister."

"Twenty-five cents!" disgustedly. "Aw, come on now,

you fellows down there, the trimmings alone are worth a dollar."

A deep voice interposed. "Fifty cents, then."

"All right! I'm given fifty cents for a starter. Some guy has bid fifty cents for this bee-u-ti-ful box, with a pretty girl attached and a large piece of pie. Who says seventy-five cents?"

Some one volunteered seventy-five cents, and the auctioneer continued more brightly:

"That's better. But not good enough. I'd pay a dollar for it myself, by golly I would. One dollar, I say. Who says a dollar fifteen?"

Finally the box was knocked down to a young man for a couple of dollars.

When all the boxes were disposed of, the owners opened them up to find out from the slip of paper inside who their supper partner was to be. This, I discovered, made for a lot of surprises, some of them very pleasant ones, some of them not so good. The supper hour, for some, became a period of joy; for others, of positive torture. In some cases it was apparent that the most complete bliss had been occasioned; in others the deadliest jealousy aroused.

I myself won an old gentleman who had come out to the country in the early days and who kept me amused with stories of pioneer times. I considered that I was lucky to have had him purchase my box.

As Christmas drew near, the school children began to prepare for their own big event—the Christmas Concert.

Our own boys were to take part in it. I can see them

yet, standing with the rest of the children on the platform for the opening chorus, and singing lustily:

*"Jingle bells, jingle bells,
Jingle all the way,
Oh, what fun it is to ride,
In a one-horse open sleigh!"*

Little Freddie had a good voice. The teacher gave him a verse to sing by himself, and how proud he was, and so were we. Robert and Harry, I must confess, were not so fortunately talented. Robert it was who was told to open his lips and mouth the words but to be sure and not permit any sounds to issue forth "for fear of putting the other kids out of tune."

The children invariably put on a splendid performance. There were dialogues and songs and choruses, sometimes to a programme length of twenty or thirty numbers. All the children, both British and foreign, had at least one number to perform alone. There was one little Swedish girl, I shall always remember, who gave us a good laugh with her "J's" that always became "Y's."

*"Now is come the yoyfullest time,
Let every one be yolly. . . ."*

To my mind the school concert was the most enjoyable event of the entire winter. Of course, there were other ways, too, that we farm people had of amusing ourselves in wintertime. Often, on fine starlit nights, when the stars hung so low in the great black dome of the sky that one

felt like reaching up and grasping them, the young people would gather at the lake, clear a space on the ice, and enjoy hours of skating. Afterwards, sitting round a merry, cackling bonfire, they would roast "wieners" or pull taffy, and drink scalding cups of coffee boiled in a huge pot over the open fire. Occasionally the entire crowd would repair to some near-by farmhouse, there to finish up the evening with songs, games and dancing.

Good, wholesome enjoyment. Never have we enjoyed anything in the city quite so whole-heartedly, either before or since.



Twelve

So it was almost Christmas, and still we had no house. It looked, indeed, as if we should have to spend Christmas Day in the shack.

All the time we had been sleeping in unheated granaries, and all the time it had been getting colder and colder. We had been driven at last into one granary, Harry and I sleeping in one bed and the three boys in another. But even with a newly acquired stove, into which we thrust wood at frequent intervals throughout the bitter nights, mountains of blankets, and with a variety of dogs and cats piled on top of us for additional warmth, it was no uncommon occurrence to wake up literally stiff with cold in the morning and to find a rim of ice along the edge of the sheets where our breath had congealed during the night, and a layer of snow, sifted in through the cracks in the roof onto the bedcovers.

Our experiences were really mild when compared to those which most of our neighbours had gone through in earlier years. We knew that. But the knowledge that other people have suffered even greater physical dis-

comforts and hardships than you yourself is precious little consolation to you when you are in the midst of suffering.

On the 23rd of December, our second wedding anniversary, Harry and I decided to discharge the remaining carpenters and move into the uncompleted house.

It was not a particularly attractive-looking place, either inside or out. The walls were bare white plaster, cold and cheerless-looking. The woodwork was unstained; so were the floors. There was no staircase, for the carpenters had not progressed to the making of one, and for several weeks after moving in we were obliged to use the kind of make-shift ladder affair which they had left behind. Its sudden collapse one day, with a very stout lady visitor aboard, induced us forthwith to engage the services of a carpenter who had received his training in the Old Country and who we judged would do the finishing work in good style.

As an initial experiment we kalsomined the walls in pastel shades—a blue bedroom, a cream bedroom, and a green and pink one respectively. The living-room was rose and cream, and the kitchen buttercup yellow.

The woodwork everywhere, excepting in the kitchen where it was enamelled white, was stained a dark oak and waxed and polished. Last of all we scraped, varnished and polished the floors till they shone like the good hardwood they were not.

A hot-air furnace and storm doors and windows ensured us adequate warmth. Of course, one suffered a bit from lack of fresh air, but I have never been the pro-

verbial fiend for fresh air that most of my compatriots have the reputation for being, so I soon got used to it. Indeed, colds were rare in wintertime, despite these conditions, and we usually all enjoyed good health.

It seemed at first as if we were going to see the unusual phenomenon of a green Christmas. Although the weather had been exceedingly cold on occasion, there had been very little snow.

On Christmas morning, however, we woke up to find the ground covered deeply with snow. The countryside at last presented a seasonable aspect.

As Christmas Day itself approached, I had been wondering how we would spend it. Here we were, on a lonely Western farm, many thousands of miles from relatives and friends who might otherwise have shared it with us. Back in England it had always been such a lovely day; a time for family reunion, for gifts and good wishes and for all the happy festivities associated with the season. There had always been Church on Christmas morning—a bright and cheerful service in a gracious old church gaily bedecked with holly and evergreens, and this had always been followed by a traditionally large dinner that seemed to last for hours, and then games and fun that continued for the best part of the night.

But here in this strange country of Canada it promised to be a very different story. For one thing, there would be no Christmas service. The minister had notified us that he would not be coming out. The house itself was far from attractive. How to give such an uninviting-looking place a real Christmasy atmosphere?

After scouting around a bit on the farm, we had finally found a solitary fir tree in a coulee, which we cut down and brought carefully home. Some of the branches were trimmed off and used for decorating the living-room. We had sent to town for some tinsel and coloured paper, and with this we decorated the tree and the room as artistically as possible. We eschewed candles, for there was too much danger of fire with them. Our furniture—what we had of it—was well polished up, and we made the best of it by bringing out of our trunks some of our wedding-presents—pieces of silver and fine linen, somewhat incongruous in that barren setting, I admit, but guaranteed to remind us that there were better days to come.

The living-room, after we had finished with it, didn't look at all bad. On the broad mantel above the fireplace we had set our most prized possessions—a couple of hand-carved Chinese vases made from fine old koa-wood; a brass ship clock that had been rescued from an American warship that had been driven ashore at Samoa in a great gale, and presented to my husband by its captain, who had fortunately been saved; and an old brass inkstand that had been in the family since the time of Bishop Latimer, to whom it had originally belonged, and from whom, on my mother-in-law's side, my husband was directly descended. We brought in stout logs and burned them on the open hearth. They let out a fine, tangy smell and sparkled and crackled in the most friendly fashion imaginable.

A few days before Christmas I had set to baking the puddings and making the mincemeat. What a business

it was, getting that pudding ready. I tried hard to remember how my mother had made hers. I had one of her treasured recipes with me, and I followed it with the most meticulous care. I had to remember that candied peel must be sliced, not chopped; that suet must be chopped, not mashed up. That eggs must be broken one by one into a dish. My mother had always said: "One stale egg will spoil the whole pudding!"

When it was all put together, the mixture had to be well stirred. The three small boys took a hand in this; the hired men, too. Each one twirled the big wooden spoon and made a wish. At last it was all in the cloth and ready to be popped into the pot. So far, so good. But how would it turn out?

Every day, the week before Christmas, we had driven into town to see if any parcels had arrived from home. But beyond a few cards from scattered friends, there was nothing. The day before Christmas even the trains didn't turn up. We felt that every man's hand was against us indeed.

We had tried very hard to find at least one extra person to spend Christmas Day with us. But at first it seemed as if there was no one who did not have a place to go to. Not that we did not appreciate one another's company, and would have been happy enough by ourselves anyway, but because we had always felt that we must follow the approved English custom of extending good cheer and good will at Christmas time by inviting some stranger to share our Christmas feast with us.

At the last moment, however, we had two guests instead of one. Our neighbour asked us if he might come over. His wife had been called down to the States on account of illness in her family, and he was unexpectedly left all alone. He arrived just before dinnertime on Christmas Day, bringing with him a veritable avalanche of parcels which he had picked up that morning at the railway station. The two trains, it appeared, had gone through during the night, and so we got our Christmas gifts in good time after all.

Our guest had also picked up the elevator-man from Fenn, genial Dick Graham, one, by the way, who represented a class of man who plays a very important part in the social and economic life of Western Canada. Dick handled, graded and purchased practically all the grain in our community that went to market in those days. He was the connecting link between the wheat market of Winnipeg and the farmers on the plains. Prices came through him, and many a valuable tip he gave us about farming and the management of horses and stock. He was always ready with help and advice, whenever it was required, and was a most popular addition to all parties and social functions.

Among our Christmas gifts we found one from the Old Country that gave us particular pleasure and delight. This was a "wireless set"—a home-made radio, constructed by a radio engineer in London who was a friend of ours. From it we managed to get the most remarkable results. Not only were we successful in tuning in on

stations all over Canada and the United States, but we actually managed to connect up with London itself.

Our little radio set consisted of three tubes in a simple wooden box, and three sets of earphones—a most primitive-looking contrivance when compared to the present-day luxurious models of workmanship and design. Yet how we enjoyed it. People came from far and near to listen in to it. For many years it was the only radio within a radius of many miles, and we were kept busy by neighbours who called to know the latest weather reports and grain prices and the news of the day that came to us regularly over the air.

Our first Christmas Dinner! What heart-burnings I suffered during the course of its preparation. Supposing the turkey should not be properly done inside? The mince pies burned? The pudding all tumble to pieces when it was turned out? The crucial moment arrived at last—the moment for dishing up. I was almost in tears. Foolish, perhaps, to get so upset over such trifles, yet many others have shed tears, I have no doubt, over similar trifles before.

To my intense surprise and relief, despite all the alarms and excursions that had occurred during the morning, the dinner turned out a success after all. The turkey was plump and young; it was done to a turn. The stuffing was tasty—by a miracle I had put in just enough onion and not too much. Every one came back for more. As for the pudding, it came out of its cloth without the loss of so much as a single crumb. I put a sprig

of holly on top of it. Naturally I wanted to serve it in the good old English way. The lighted pudding had always been a great event of my own young days. One of the hired men, who had followed me into the kitchen, seeing me with the brandy bottle in my hand, asked me what I was going to do with it. "I'm going to pour some over the pudding and set fire to it," I told him. "Will you please cut me a slice first?" he asked. "You see, I am a strict teetotaler."

I cut a piece for him, but omitted to tell him that there was a quarter of a pint of brandy inside the pudding itself.

When the dishes were finally washed and put away, I joined the group around the fireside. Daylight was fading, the curtains were drawn, the lamps lit. The fire blazed merrily. Every one appeared to be in a mellow mood, satisfied and happy.

For the first time since leaving home and loved ones I felt happy myself. After all, I had now established a home of my own. I had a new generation of loved ones around me. Even if this was not the place where I had really wanted to be, even if I was still unsettled, still feeling a bit like a fish out of water, at least the worst of the rough edges had now been worn off and the future promised a little smoother sailing.

I have spent many happy Christmases since but never one that was any happier than that first Christmas on the prairies.



Thirteen

Now the New Year was approaching. How were we going to celebrate that?

I decided to make it the occasion of a house-warming and invited some thirty of my neighbours to a dance. Our music was to be a fiddle and a guitar.

Five of the thirty I had invited sent word to say they could not come. *Would* not, is perhaps more correct, since they belonged to the non-dancing element and most emphatically did not approve of the form my party was to take. That left twenty-five prospective guests and for them I made my plans.

The night of the dance broke stormily. Heavy clouds gathered in the sky, a cold wind whistled in from the north, and the thermometer dropped many degrees below zero.

But this did not deter my guests. Far from it. By eight o'clock they began to arrive. Singly, in couples, and in parties. The yard slowly began to fill up with sleighs, cutters and saddle horses, which were tethered to every available fence post and every handy tree.

People came in at the front door, at the back door, and

at the side door. They came in so thick and fast that I gave up any attempt to welcome them, hostess fashion, but allowed them to crowd me into a corner while they filed past, up the stairs and into all the bedrooms, there to deposit their wraps and their sleeping babies on the beds—the babies, to my subsequent amazement, for the most part sleeping soundly all night, heedless of the constant babble of voices, the shuffling of innumerable feet, and the incessant scraping of fiddles.

Actually about eighty people turned up at that party, the majority of them being perfect strangers to me. Some of them came from twenty and thirty miles away. Word of the dance had travelled far and wide; every one wanted to come and have a good look at me, at my family, and at my new house. My invitations, I found, had really been superfluous. If you give a party in the country, then you must expect any one and every one who hears about it to come.

When the big living-room was literally jammed with people, the orchestra started to play. One of the crowd appointed himself a sort of master-of-ceremonies, and shouted out the various numbers, which, as usual, followed each other in breath-taking succession. The floor soon began to heave so alarmingly that we had to dash down into the basement, find a substantial post, and prop it up for safety. In less time than it takes to tell, the entire surface was gone from my carefully polished wood, and many hours of hard labour had been completely wiped out.

When the supper hour approached I went into the kitchen, in some trepidation, to see about the refreshments. I had prepared for twenty-five people. How was I ever going to feed this large and probably hungry multitude?

To my surprise I found the room already in possession of a group of farm women who seemed to have taken charge of proceedings. The brimming wash-boiler was set on the stove and was emitting the pleasing aroma of boiling coffee. My plates of sandwiches and cakes had been brought forth from the cupboard and were set out in readiness on the kitchen cabinet.

"I'm sure there isn't enough to go round," I deplored, looking anxiously at the now meagre-appearing display. "There are so many more people than I expected."

"Oh, you don't need to worry," one of the women assured me. "There's tons of food." She pointed to the kitchen table, on which, I now noticed for the first time, were piled a number of bulky looking packages.

"What—is that food?" I asked.

"Yes. Didn't you know that every one brings something along to a party like this? You surely didn't expect to have to feed all this crowd yourself?"

"Well, I didn't expect to feed quite so many," I admitted. "This seems to be a splendid idea, though."

There turned out to be sufficient eatables to feed almost twice the number of people who were present. In fact, we lived on sandwiches and cakes for days afterwards. And what delectable sandwiches and cakes they were, too.

It was not until about four o'clock in the morning that the apparently still-unwearied orchestra finally broke into the strains of *Home Sweet Home* and the crowd began reluctantly to gather together their babies and their belongings and set out for home.

The earlier hint of a storm had by this time developed into a lively blizzard, and the snow was coming down so thick and fast that it was almost impossible to see more than a foot or two ahead.

Some of our guests started out bravely enough but got no farther than our nearest neighbour's house, where they had to remain till the storm let up, many hours later. Others breasted it to their own doors, but reported a terrible trip. A large number decided to remain right with us until the worst was over. They were there for breakfast and some even stayed till dinnertime.

This storm was the real beginning of winter. The snow was driven by a pitiless north wind which roared around the house and seemed to shake its very foundations. It piled into great drifts against the doors and had to be dug away time and time again as we were forced to go out for wood and to do the necessary chores. Outside one waded through snow accumulating inches deeper every hour and faced the lashing scourge of the fiercely driven sleet.

On the second day, being short of hay, one of our lads offered to go down on the flat and bring in a load. The hay stack was about a mile from the house. The boy reached the stack all right, but when he tried to return

home, he lost his bearings. His trail had been wiped out within a few minutes after he had made it. His horses, instinctively turning from the wind, bore him more and more to the south instead of to the west. The field he was in was a full half mile each way and in it he wandered around and around in circles for what seemed like interminable hours. On this river bottom, too, the temperature was always several degrees lower than anywhere else and there was little protection from the wind which swept clear across it with unparalleled force.

At last he decided to get out of the sleigh and try and lead his horses in an endeavour to find the trail. Immediately he was driven to his knees by the force of the wind and the depth of the snow. He thought of turning the team loose—"to give the poor beasts a chance," he told us—and of endeavouring to strike out for home on foot himself. He soon found that to be hopeless, however, for he had completely lost all sense of direction. He could tell nothing from the wind, which seemed to be blowing in on him from all sides. The snow stung him and heavy icicles formed on his brows and his lashes, almost obscuring his sight. Soon he was beginning to freeze from the long exposure and to feel himself at the point of exhaustion from his efforts. He longed to lie down, yet he knew that that would be fatal. He kept telling himself: "I must not get drowsy! I must not lose my head!"

In his blind stumblings he came at last to the gate leading out on to the road. At least there was a trail of sorts

here, and the horses seemed able to follow it. He knew that he was driving away from our own house, but there was a neighbour's house right on the road and if he could find that, he would be all right.

He drove on and on with painful slowness until at last, looming momentarily out of the blizzard, he discerned the vague outlines of the house he sought. Staggering and groping through the deep snow, he made his way to the barn, where he stabled his weary, ice-covered horses before seeking shelter for himself.

Our neighbours gladly took him in and made him warm and comfortable, but as we did not have telephones in those days, they were unable to let us know of his safe arrival at their home.

Meanwhile, we at home had been awaiting the lad's return with growing misgivings. At last, my husband and two of the men decided to go out and look for him. They roped themselves together and set out.

Down on the flat they found faint indications of his tracks, but the tracks were so confused that they were unable to follow them. They wandered around for an hour, shouting and calling his name, but finally had to return to the house, half-frozen and utterly exhausted.

After a brief rest, they were ready to start out again. But just as they did so, the missing lad drove into the yard. He had returned by a shorter and easier route, following a fence line down to the house from an upper field near our neighbour's. We were certainly thankful to have him return alive and unhurt.

It snowed for four days in all. Then the snow ceased and the sun shone out again from a cloudless blue sky. The storm had passed, but this time the snow remained.

There were days when it was quite pleasant to be outside. The air was crisp, tangy like wine, and even a very low temperature, without a wind, was quite endurable. Much more so than a higher one *with* a wind.

Maybe my blood was thick, for I did not feel the cold very much at all. It was a dry cold, and very much easier to bear than the damp, clammy, shivery cold of old England. Indeed, I found the intense heat of summer much more disagreeable than the sub-zero temperatures of winter, for although one can put on any number of clothes to keep warm, there is a limit to what one can take off to keep cool.

Those Alberta winters were made bearable, and even enjoyable, chiefly on account of the Chinook winds. This wind somewhat resembles the warm Föhn wind of Switzerland. It comes blowing over the high peaks of the Rockies, licking up the snow in the most amazing fashion, at frequent intervals throughout the winter.

A number of explanations are current regarding the origin of the Chinook wind. One of the most authentic, I believe, is that when the barometer is high over the mountains, and an area of low temperature has developed over Alberta, there will naturally be a strong tendency for the air, from the high pressure over the Rockies, to move down the slopes towards the centre of the low area on the plains. This action downward causes compression of

the air, and consequently it is heated and forms what is called the Chinook wind.

The Chinook wind is invariably forecast by a peculiar "arch" in the sky, known as the Chinook Arch. It is a most welcome sign indeed in cold weather and one eagerly watched for by prairie dwellers.

Many amusing tales are told of the marvellous effect of the Chinook wind on the snow. There is one old story—for whose authenticity I will not vouch—which tells of a farmer who was driving his sleigh to town with the Chinook wind blowing so hard behind him that while his front runners were in the snow, his rear runners were on dry ground all the way!

The farther one travels east on the prairies, the longer and harsher the winters become, for the force of the Chinook gradually becomes less and less. Many times I had good cause to thank a merciful Providence that set my prairie home in the path of the gentle Chinook.

Another striking phenomenon of the weather, with which we soon grew familiar, was the Aurora Borealis, or Northern Lights.

Many a time I have seen, in the black dome of the heavens, a great fan of multi-coloured lights, flaming and flickering, rising and falling, changing and shifting, shimmering and shaking, sometimes breaking in one part and sometimes in another, one minute clear white and another presenting a variety of beautiful colours.

Far less is known of the origin of the Northern Lights than of the Chinook wind. Like many others, I used to

imagine that they were a reflection of the sun's rays on icebergs, way up north, but scientists now seem to believe them to be some sort of electrical discharges connected with magnetic disturbances in the region of the Poles. Whatever the explanation may be, the fact remains that the Northern Lights are one of the most beautiful and extraordinary phenomena of nature to be found in Northern Canada.

The Northern Lights, by the way, were somewhat rivalled, a few years later, by the sometimes marvellous glow in the southern sky from the burning gas in the Turner Valley Oil Field, almost two hundred miles away. This bright, ruddy glare, particularly vivid on clear nights, looked most fearsome, as indeed, when one viewed the column of burning gas at close hand, it actually was.





Fourteen

After six solid months of winter, we began to wonder if spring was ever coming at all. March came in like the proverbial lamb and like a lion it went out, with a new cold snap that seemed to threaten that winter was actually going to start in all over again. The prairie still preserved its blanket of white; the thermometer remained depressingly low.

Then one morning we woke up to the sound of geese honking high overhead. We looked out of the window and saw a great flock of them, flying directly over our farm, in regular formation, towards the north. The sun, which had been climbing higher and higher in the heavens every day, seemed now to be shining with a more beneficent glow. When we went outside we found that it was unexpectedly mild and balmy. Great clods of snow were falling from the roof, landing on the earth below with many a bang and crash. There was a constant drip, drip of water from the eaves, where icicles were melting and running away on the ground in little rivulets that broke the smooth surface of the snow.

A few more days and there were patches of brown earth everywhere. The pungent odour of moist soil rose to greet one's nostrils. Tiny shoots of green showed up between the shrivelled brown blades of last year's grass. And, wonder of wonders, there among them I found a tiny, purple anemone.

One day, too, I discovered a "prairie chicken dance hall" right on our own farm. As we drove along the road beside one of the fields, I noticed a bunch of perhaps thirty prairie chickens standing in a sort of circle, about twenty feet in diameter, on a piece of high, dry land.

I was curious, and stopped the rig to watch them. They appeared to be going through certain well-defined movements. A bird would advance from one side, for instance, and meet another in the centre. The two would flutter about each other, bowing and preening and swishing their tail feathers in the most provocative manner. All the time they would be making little soft, clucking noises—talking to each other, I suppose. In other words, making love. Then they would return to their places, and others would come forward and repeat the performance.

I was told that this was the mating season. This, too, was a sure sign of spring.

Yes, the winter had passed. Spring had really come.

Spring comes to the prairies clothed in beauty, but the prairie farmer seldom has time to appreciate or enjoy it.

Spring, for him, is a period of great and persistent exertion and activity. Experience has taught him that there are but very few golden hours in which to prepare his fields and to sow his crops. An hour lost at this time of the year is seldom, if ever, regained. Seeding in Alberta, for instance, usually starts about the 20th of April, and as farmers do not like to seed wheat after the 15th of May, there is naturally not a moment to be lost.

Unlike most industries, which are able to suit their work and output to probable demand and price, the farmer is quite unable so to adjust his operations. His farm consists of so many acres to be seeded, so many to be summer-fallowed. Whatever the prospect ahead of him, whether it be for a good year or a bad one, all the motions must be gone through, and he must seed in due season the land which is available on his farm for that purpose.

When it is decided that the time has come to start seeding, an undercurrent of almost feverish activity pervades the entire farm household. Overnight the order goes forth:

"Breakfast at 5.30 tomorrow morning! All hands up at 4.30. Seeding starts."

Even the horses seem to know that spring has arrived. Those who have made themselves a nuisance following you around all winter are now hard to catch, and even a quart of oats, temptingly shaken in a pail beneath their very noses, only evokes what sounds like

hilarious snorts of contempt. They frisk their tails and away they run.

Men and women alike now work from before sunup till long after sundown. It is like harvest time all over again, only now the weather is of more vital importance than at any other time in the year.

Of course, rain is the most important necessity of all. But not until the seed is safely in the ground. Wet days during actual seeding time mean delay, and delay in turn may make a crop so late in maturing that the early fall frosts will catch it and ruin it.

Once the land is seeded, however, rain is prayed for whole-heartedly—rain to consummate the intricate and wonderful process of germination as the seed lies in its warm, earthy bed; rain during the seedling period, when the first tender shoots are beginning to appear above the ground and seek the sun and when the roots are stretching downward in search of food; an abundance of rain in May, June and July, and then in July and August long days of sunshine, with cool nights, interspersed with refreshing showers. That is the ideal weather which the farmer prays for but seldom gets.

The spring of 1921, our first spring on the farm, started out with favourable weather conditions. Also we felt we were in a position to make a good start in our new business of seed growing.

From the very outset we had been able to get in touch with the right people to train and advise us in our work,

and to guide and direct our efforts once they were started. Our neighbours had helped us a good deal, too, with sound, practical farming advice. Thank goodness my husband and myself were both blessed with inquiring minds! We kept on asking questions of every one, not only *how* things were done but *why* they were done. Sometimes, I fear, we made a great nuisance of ourselves—but we did get the information.

We had known, too, that scientific institutions of agriculture in Canada regularly put out books and pamphlets on all subjects pertaining to agricultural work, and that these publications were available to any one free of cost. So we had acquired all the books and pamphlets we could possibly lay our hands on, and had studied them all from cover to cover.

So much we learned from them. I have often felt that many farm homes could be bettered, and farming operations improved, if advantage were only more generally taken of this great mass of useful information that is so freely available to all.

It would take a book to mention all the people who helped us.

Dr. L. H. Newman, then Secretary of the Canadian Seed Growers' Association, advised us to purchase enough Registered Marquis wheat to seed twenty acres. What an absorbing interest we took in the progress of that first precious crop!

During the summer months we carefully *rogued*, or weeded, the field by hand. In later years, as the acreage

in seed grain was increased, we carried on this work by engaging gangs of school boys to do it. The lads were usually only too glad to come to the farm for their holidays, and earn a dollar a day and enjoy good country fare. The roguing job became so popular, in fact, that we actually developed a "waiting list."

The boys would walk through the fields in gangs, with a "leader" following at the rear. The leader received ten cents for every large weed or undesirable plant that the boys missed, and this ten cents was paid to him out of *their* wages. He was changed, by the way, every day. Naturally, the misses were few and far between.

The boys would walk along with a sort of marching step, often bare from the waist up, and singing lustily as they went. Very amusing, too, were some of the words, concocted among them to fit some familiar tune. One of them, I remember, ran as follows:

*"Fireweed, stinkweed, mustard, rose,
That's the way the weeding goes!"*

In the fall, just before the grain was ready to harvest, our real work in seed selection began. We spent long hours each day studying it and selecting outstanding heads—heads that were as true to variety as my husband could conceive them to be.

Many days of steady tramping and selection resulted in a collection of several hundred heads. These were carefully packed away in cotton wool, to await further observation and dealing with during the forthcoming winter months.

A few days before harvesting took place, Dr. Robert Newton, plant breeder from the University of Alberta, came to inspect the crop on behalf of the Canadian Seed Growers' Association. He walked through the field, picking out with unerring precision plants of other varieties, or those that were not quite true to type. (The regulations permitted but one off-type plant in every ten thousand—a very high standard of excellence indeed.) To our great relief the field passed easily.

At last the day arrived to harvest the grain. We spent hours and hours cleaning the machinery, making the men turn out their pockets and the cuffs of their trousers, picking the mud from the feet of the horses, sweeping out racks and wagons and bins—all so that not a single kernel of any other strain or variety could possibly become mixed with that first precious crop of registered Marquis Wheat.

Finally the thresher (we had purchased one of our own for the great event) went on to the land.

The result was some thirty bushels to the acre of the very finest grain one could ever hope to see. After that we successfully took off nine more seed crops, making ten in all, over the period of ten years that we remained on the farm, harvesting on an average from some three hundred acres each year, and all of it the very finest quality of registered seed obtainable in Canada.

In addition we managed hundreds of individual plots, and experimented with many different strains of highly bred material each year.

But all the care and effort we lavished on our fields and on our plots in later years were trivial it seemed when compared to the almost loving care and painstaking effort we lavished on that first precious crop of twenty acres.

This was probably the first field of registered grain ever grown in the district of Fenn, and we afterwards found that there were great discussions taking place concerning it. One or two generous and kindly minded neighbours continued to take an interest in our work, and encouraged and cheered us on, but for the most part the people around considered us to be completely mad.

During the fall, while the seeds were being cleaned up with the elaborate "Marot" cleaner which we had imported from France for that purpose, a two-pound sample of the material we had produced was sent to the Dominion Seed Branch in Calgary for a germination and purity test. The standard of perfection required was again very high.

Fortunately our sample passed this rigorous test, and we were able to proceed with the sacking of it.

When the seed was all sacked, an inspector visited the farm and examined the grain in *every* sack. The sacks, having passed according to the requirements of the Dominion Seed Act, each one was tied, sealed, and a label or certificate, signed by the inspector representing the Seed Branch and guaranteeing the crop registration and its trueness to variety and quality, was attached thereto. All registered seeds produced in Canada are

sold under this Government guarantee. So far as I know, Canada is the only country in the world doing this in such a thorough manner.

Wheat, that first seed-growing year of ours, was one dollar and thirty-five cents a bushel at the elevator at Fenn. We asked two dollars and fifty cents a bushel for our seed, and a very modest advertisement in one or two farm papers brought applications for more seed than our fields could ever produce. I might say, by the way, that for all the seed we sold all over Canada, in years to come, we never asked a deposit. Most of our buyers were complete strangers to us. Yet we never, in all those years that we did business, failed to receive payment but once, and that once, we like to believe, was not a deliberate omission but just a case of forgetfulness.

Very early in the game I discovered that it was not all honey being a seed-grower's wife.

During the fall and winter, for instance, I had to do my share in the selecting and comparing of heads for the seed plots of next year. The house was rendered almost untenable by reason of the clutter of machinery and other working paraphernalia that was brought into it for this purpose.

Heavy sacks of grain would be arranged around the rooms against the walls, covering an appreciable amount of floor space, dirtying the wallpaper and shedding dust over everything. The piano top and any other conveniently available flat surface would be decorated with

an array of cups, saucers, dishes and plates, borrowed from the kitchen stock, which would contain various precious specimens and samples of seeds, all of which must not be touched under penalty of dire displeasure on the part of the master of the house. The mantelpiece, too, would be stacked with packages and envelopes, each containing its precious contribution of specially selected heads. Sheaves of grain would often be suspended from the picture rails and from the ceiling. Indeed, there would seldom be a vacant space left untouched.

Worse than all this, the hand-grading machine would be brought into the house and set on the dining-room table between meals, while the heavy cylinders used with it would be stacked in the hall, to the discomfiture of any one who happened to knock against them and stub an unsuspecting toe. They were massive, unwieldy things, made of heavy steel, and toppled over on the slightest provocation. Hand screens of various sizes, weights and dimensions, would also be left lying all over the place in untidy piles.

I am, on the whole, a very easy-going sort of person. I seldom fly into a temper. But having my house in such a condition almost drove me wild. Once, indeed, I got thoroughly and completely mad. I had just treated myself, out of my very own money, to a real bath-tub. It was only an iron one, painted white, but it was a luxury, those days, that almost defied description.

I had fixed up a little room off the kitchen as a bathroom. We did not have running water, of course, but

it was easy enough to carry pailfuls of hot water from the tank at the side of the kitchen stove to this tub and to empty it through a piece of piping set in the floor. That little room, crude as it might have appeared to a city person, was my pride and joy.

The day the bath-tub was installed I had occasion to go in to Big Valley. I had planned to take my first bath in it that very night. When I came home, I went into the bathroom to fix up my bath. Imagine my horror and rage to find my precious tub full of wheat floating in boiling hot water.

Some one had sent Harry some new wheat, Reward, to try out. This wheat was infected with loose smut, and the treatment consisted of soaking it for a certain period of time in very hot water. Looking around for some container to put it in, they had decided upon my new bath-tub as being just the very thing.

I made the men take it all out at once. But the damage was done. The grain left a dark yellow stain all around the tub, which successive scrubblings failed to remove. I cried my head off about that incident. I bawled everybody out—my husband hardest of all. But I did get over it, as I got over everything else. I found out that I just had to accept such things if I wanted to get along, if the farm was to progress. Finally I got to the point where, even if the walls of the house had fallen about me, I think I should have sat there and taken it philosophically. That is probably why—as a friend remarked the other day—“Nothing very much seems to upset you!”

In the midst of this "methodical disorder," as my husband called it, I used to sit for hours and hours, cutting heads, sorting, sifting, comparing, mounting and filing them. I did my housework when I could, and sometimes I had to leave it altogether and have one grand clean-up once a week. Fortunately, the worst of it only happened in the fall, and I learned to anticipate it and prepare for it. Somehow or other things got done. And successfully, too, as I later hope to prove.

By this time, too, we had learned that seed growing was a regular business and necessitated a lot of work in the way of salesmanship and so forth. We found it increasingly difficult to do this necessary business owing to the lack of a telephone.

Up until shortly before our arrival, the farmers had been using a telephone system which had been erected by themselves. Odd poles and sagging lines still stood here and there about the countryside, but the poles were rapidly being chopped up for firewood and the wire used to repair fences. This telephone system had connected farmers with one another but not with the towns or cities in the "outside" world.

After some correspondence with the powers that be, we were informed that the Government would install a telephone system in our district, but that, of course, the farmers would have to pay for it. One or two remained out but the majority signed up. Our own share in the installation of this telephone system cost us quite a large sum. Our house was almost a mile in from the road and

we ourselves had to pay for every post from the road to the house. If I remember correctly, it came to around three hundred dollars or so.

We were on a line comprised of twenty subscribers, each of whom had his own special ring. Our own ring, for instance, was one long, four short, and one long. Each individual ring was recorded by all the twenty telephones and at first it was somewhat disconcerting to hear the continual ringing of the telephone bell at all hours of the day and night. After a while, however, we came to be so used to it that unconsciously we segregated our own call without being bothered by the rest.

The really amusing thing about this party-line system was the habit it engendered, even in the best-intentioned people, of listening in—or “rubbering” as it is called.

Naturally, rubbering was strictly forbidden by the telephone company itself, but so far as I know, the law was never enforced. There were altogether too many offenders, for one thing, and it would have been very difficult to trace them. In any case, there was really much excuse for the person who did it. Often it would be some lonely man or woman, cut off from contact with other human beings for days and even weeks at a time. Just to hear another human voice was something of a thrill. Then, too, in the country, every one becomes frankly interested in the doings of every one else. It is a small world in which news of the arrival of a baby, the progress of a love affair, the fact that Jenny Jones has been to

town and bought a new dress or that young Tommy Smith has come down with the measles, is eagerly waited for and absorbed by the entire community.

I remember one old gentleman, who lived quite close to us, who was partially paralysed and confined to the house most of the time. He used to sit in an arm chair, parked close to the telephone, and every time the bell rang he would take down the receiver and listen contentedly to all that was being said. Sometimes he would become so interested that he would break into the conversation and give his own opinion and agree or disagree with what was being discussed. This was somewhat upsetting at times, but we finally got used to it, and tolerated and sometimes even welcomed his unexpected interruptions.

I recall one occasion, shortly after the telephone had been installed, when my husband was invited to speak over the radio by means of our rural telephone. This was considered to be quite a feat of engineering in those early days of radio and somewhat of a triumph for the telephone company. To this day I do not know how they managed to keep the line clear for twelve minutes, without interruption, between our own house and the Stettler Exchange, from whence the talk went over the lines to Edmonton and then out on the air from the broadcasting studio there. In our own living-room on the farm the talk came back to us simultaneously over the radio with my husband's voice speaking at the telephone in the hall.



Fifteen

That spring in 1921 had brought Harry new interests and new activities on the farm, and it had brought me personally the knowledge that, by the time the leaves would begin to turn colour in the fall, I should be anticipating the birth of my first child.

Up until that time I had never thought very much about babies. Having ~~no~~ brothers or sisters of my own, or any relatives with young children, I had naturally never been brought into contact with them. I hardly knew one end of a baby from another. I was really quite afraid of them. My comparatively brief experience with my three small stepsons, who, after all, were far from being babies, had certainly not prepared me for the new adventure that now loomed ahead.

I determined to face it as "common sensically" as possible. I had always felt that a good deal of sentimental nonsense, some of it altogether false, had been written about motherhood. That it was a wonderful and soul-stirring experience I could well believe, but at the same time it seemed to me to be a perfectly normal and nat-

ural one. When I observed with what serene confidence and lack of excitement the country mothers faced it, many of them giving birth to their babies without either a doctor or a nurse's care, I realized that, whatever my own personal fears and qualms might be, I must try to face it in the same courageous and confident fashion if I was ever to hold my end up with them.

Despite the fact that I had always regarded myself as a very modern young woman, and had known about most of the "facts of life" long before I was married, I actually knew little or nothing about the physical phenomena of human pregnancy and birth.

I had no intimate friends at that time from whom to seek advice or sympathy, so that, as the time passed and my condition became physically apparent, I began to feel very bewildered, and sometimes terribly frightened, at the prospect of what was going to happen to me. I knew moments of almost breathless happiness and anticipation, but there were also long periods of intense discomfort, boredom and fear.

I might have spent a good deal of time thinking about my own condition, and perhaps worrying myself into a state of nervous collapse, had it not been that all my thoughts and energies were suddenly and almost overwhelmingly absorbed by an increasingly nerve-racking responsibility.

Little Freddie, who, up to this time, had appeared to be enjoying fairly normal health—despite his disability

—suddenly became seriously ill, demanding our almost undivided attention.

The initial condition was a large abscess on the right arm, which caused painful swelling and partial paralysis. We took him to the Big Valley doctor, who lanced the abscess but without apparently removing the cause, for the arm continued in such a serious state that the doctor advised me to leave Freddie in town with him for constant observation and care.

Freddie cried bitterly when the time came for me to leave at night and return to the farm, and finally his pitiful pleadings induced me to search Big Valley for a woman to send home to the farm in my place. Having found one, I made plans to remain with the sick boy as long as he should need me.

For a couple of days I never left Freddie's side. He was in great pain, half-delirious, and apparently failing rapidly. The third night the condition culminated in a sort of epileptic fit, from which neither the doctor, the nurse, nor myself ever expected to see him emerge alive. We sent for his father, who came in post-haste from the farm. We sat together all night, waiting for the end.

Strangely enough, however, when the terrible spasms had apparently exhausted themselves, he grew calmer and calmer, and finally, under the influence of a mild opiate, fell into a deep and refreshing sleep. When he awoke, many hours later, he was so much improved that the doctor advised us to go home. I promised, however, to come in each day and visit him.

For a week I did this, driving back and forth to Big Valley by myself, leaving home directly after breakfast and returning in time for supper at night.

One day I had a rather terrifying experience on the road. We had a very sprightly driving team at that time, one of the horses—appropriately named Rowdy—being of a particularly high-spirited nature. It was exceedingly hot weather and the flies were bad. Somehow or other one of my lines got under Rowdy's tail. I tried to get it free, but the horse immediately clamped down its tail tight on the leather line. Instead of letting the line go loose, and probably freeing it the first time the horse switched its tail again, I pulled and pulled, and the more I pulled the tighter Rowdy pressed his tail against his body. All at once, probably aggravated by the heat and the flies and my inexpert hands on the lines, Rowdy sprang forward and bolted away. Off we went, fast and furious, at a breakneck speed along the trail. The ramshackle old buggy bumped and tossed about with me on the seat. Frantically I hung on to the lines, shouting to the horses to "Whoa! Whoa!" But they paid no attention to me. The road to Big Valley was not a straight one; it wound round brush patches and sloughs and turned at sharp angles at the bottom of precarious hills. I believed that any moment I would be thrown out and killed. I felt that my end had really come.

Suddenly I saw ahead of me a large slough on the right-hand side of the trail. The horse on that side was easy to manage. It was the left-hand horse under whose tail

my line was fixed. So I pulled on the free line and to my great relief the horse turned, and Rowdy with it, and both ran shoulder high into the slough. The cool water had the desired effect. They stopped dead.

I sat in the buggy, trembling all over, wondering what to do next. First, I knew, I must get the line free. So I clambered forward over the front of the buggy, as near to the horse as I could get, and gently worked it loose. Then, to add insult to injury, I slipped and fell partly into the water. I was soaked up to my waist. Clammy and cold, I got back on the seat and turned the horses once more on to the trail. I had about four miles more to drive and never was I so uncomfortable and so miserable as I was during that time.

When I reached the hospital, Dr. Smyth took one look at me and said:

"You'd better go to bed at once. You look all in!"

I stayed in bed all day long, beside Freddie, and went home that night, very slowly and fearfully, praying that nothing more would happen further to shatter my already sadly shaken nerves.

Fortunately Freddie became so much better that a few days later the doctor permitted him to come home. I now had a good woman doing the housework for me, so I devoted all my time to him. He was pitifully weak, and had to be carried about everywhere like a baby, and waited on as if indeed he had been one.

However, the improvement continued, and to our surprise and delight he was well enough to be taken to the

annual summer picnic of the community. He could not, of course, join the children in their racing and their games—he had never been able to do this, alas—but he seemed to find a wistful pleasure in watching them. Perhaps he knew, even then, that he would never watch them again.

By the beginning of July Freddie was so much better that we felt it safe to leave him for a few days in the care of our housekeeper, who promised to let us know immediately if any change should take place for the worse. Harry wanted to visit the Calgary Exhibition; I wished to do some necessary shopping for the expected baby.

I have never regretted anything so much in all my life as that brief visit to Calgary. When I bade good-bye to little Fred I never dreamed that they were the very last words I was ever going to exchange with him.

That visit to Calgary started out pleasantly enough. We had passed through the city on our way from California to Alberta; now I was really to see it for the first time.

I loved Calgary at first sight.

"I have not seen

*A city now remembered with more joy
Than Calgary, the fair embodiment
Of all the youthful powers of the West;
Its beauty unconfined, its air as clear
As that above the ocean, and its people
The very symbols of deep kindness."*

Thus sings Nathaniel Benson, young Canadian poet, and to these sentiments I, too, can subscribe whole-heartedly.

This city of the Foothills, as it is called, is situated at the confluence of two ice-cold mountain streams—the Bow and the Elbow Rivers. All around it, beyond the low-lying hills that encircle it, stretch the illimitable plains, once the hunting ground of the wild buffalo and the Indian, more recently of the vast herds of cattle that comprised the first great ranches; and today broken up into comparatively small farms, but farms which help to give it that important place which it holds in supplying the wheat markets of the world.

The present city, which dates from about 1875, was named by Colonel Macleod, an early settler, after his birthplace in the Western Isles of Scotland. With the coming of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1886 it began its real growth.

Up to that time Calgary had been little more than a distributing centre for Indians, traders and ranchers—a veritable “cow town.” Today it is the largest city in Alberta, although, I believe, Edmonton disputes this, with a population of over sixty thousand people. Until caught in a quagmire of financial depression, brought about to some extent by over-speculation in city lots and oil wells, it was said to be probably the richest city for its size in the whole of Canada.

On this, our first visit to Calgary, we stayed at that very modern hostelry of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Palliser Hotel. The Palliser adjoins the railway station and abuts onto Ninth Avenue, a narrow street of tall

office buildings, hotels and warehouses, which runs parallel with Eighth Avenue, the main thoroughfare of the city. Ninth Avenue, it is interesting to note, was once known by the significant title of "Whiskey Row."

From our luxurious room on the fifth floor we had a splendid view of the surrounding countryside. Immediately below we could see a vista of tree-lined streets, with neat, gaily coloured houses. Scattered about were innumerable small parks and at least half a dozen or more golf courses. Winding across the city were the green, crystal-clear waters of the two rivers, and in the distance, far-flung against the azure blue of the western sky, lay the long, jagged line of the Rockies, their snow-capped peaks marking the western boundary of the great prairie-plains.

Later, as we strolled around the city, it seemed to me that there was a very spécial kind of magnetism about the place. The air was winey; there was a tang to it I had never experienced anywhere before. Perhaps the high altitude accounted for this — we were over three thousand feet above sea level. Perhaps it was something more intangible. Even the people walked with a swinging lilt to their step that seemed to me to symbolize the living, youthful energy of the West.

Each different street presented some little drama to our eager eyes. On one, for instance, we saw a group of newly arrived European immigrants, still in the picturesque costume of their far-away country — gaily kerchiefed, voluminously skirted women; brightly apparelled, heavily sabotted men.

On another there shot by us a sun-tanned cowboy, astride a sleek sorrel horse, colourful in broad sombrero, red shirt and goatskin "chaps." A little later there passed a stalwart Indian, large-framed and noble-visaged, the proud soul of his vanquished race slumbering in his deep-set eyes. And on yet another corner we paused to admire a crimson-coated "mountie" — splendid specimen of that world-famous band of men — the Royal Canadian Mounted Police — who have patrolled the plains since as far back as 1873.

We had come down on the Saturday before Exhibition week in order to be in town for the opening parade. This parade, year after year, never fails to draw a vast crowd. In the procession ride ranch owners in buckboards, brightly clad cowboys and cowgirls astride fine horses, "mounties" in scarlet and gold, Indians with faces streaked and rimmed with ochre and vermilion, and wearing the most gorgeous beaded coats, fringed "chaps" and feathered head-dresses. Lastly come the decorated "floats" representing the business people of the city.

On one occasion, several years later, I was standing on the sidewalk watching this procession go by, when all at once a smiling, brown-faced cowboy leaned forward in his saddle, skilfully twirled his lasso, flung it towards me, and in a second had me up on his horse beside him. Laughing and embarrassed, but thoroughly enjoying the situation none the less, I was carried down Eighth Avenue pressed against his sweaty shirt, until the Fair Grounds were reached. There, with a gay tweak at my cheek, he

released me. Was I offended? Far from it! I considered it a compliment and a very entertaining experience.

All through the week, out at the grounds, there were all kinds of interesting and unusual events going on—unusual not only to us newcomers to the West but to the average Westerner himself, since the ranching days are slowly but surely passing away, and broncho busting, steer riding, roping and branding of cattle, races for ponies ridden by Indians, wild cow milking, chuck wagon races, are, as much a novelty to the native as they are to the visitor.

At the end of the week, as a grand finale, there was the Cowboy Ball. Where, anywhere else in the world I should like to know, could such an event as this be successfully staged?

Outside the Palliser Hotel, on the asphalt pavement of Ninth Avenue, cowboys and their girls danced tirelessly beneath the star-studded sky. Inside, in the huge dining-room and ballroom of the hotel itself, danced the townspeople, all together, regardless of position or wealth. In yet another room danced the old-timers, stepping it out to the strains of a fiddle and the voice of a caller resurrected from goodness knows where.

It has been said that the Stampede is to Calgary what the Mardi Gras is to New Orleans. It is, I think, even more than that. It is an event that is unique in the whole world. It is a combination of Fair and Wild West Show that is unparalleled anywhere.

I know that there has been some discussion, particularly

in England, concerning the cruelty connected with rodeo shows. Inhuman treatment of animals is something that no rancher will countenance, either on the home range or in public. Accidents, of course, sometimes occur at rodeos, but they are, for the most part, accidents that might just as easily have occurred out on the range or in the home corrals. Rules can be, and sometimes are, broken, but most exhibition authorities—and certainly the ones at Calgary—are extraordinarily strict, and any one who is caught breaking them gets short shrift.

At the Calgary Stampede, which I saw every year thereafter, there was not one part of the contest that did not actually exemplify the general work of the cowboy. No individual was paid to put on a performance of any kind within the arena enclosure. Everything was of a competitive nature. For the contestants it was "all part of the day's work."



Sixteen

The day before we had planned to return home, we received a telegram which read:

"Come at once. Freddie collapsed this morning."

We took the first train for Fenn. How interminably long that trip seemed. How our hearts were wrung with anxiety and despair. I chided myself unmercifully for ever having left the little boy for a minute.

When we reached the farm we found that he had already been taken by a kindly neighbour back to the hospital in Big Valley. When we arrived there he had sunk into a coma from which all our efforts to rouse him were of no avail.

Of course, in a measure I had been prepared. But now that the end had come, it was a shock, notwithstanding.

I do not know the exact moment that little Freddie ceased to breathe. It was some time during the early hours of a beautiful July morning. Without a sign to those of us who watched with streaming eyes above his bed, the tired soul escaped its frail mortal dwelling, and the poor, pain-racked little body was at rest at last.

Dr. Smyth of Big Valley was unbelievably kind. Both he and his capable nurse were unremitting in their efforts to make the little boy's last hours on earth as comfortable and as free from pain as humanly possible.

And here, I think, is an appropriate place to pay a tribute, not only to my good friend, Dr. Smyth, but to all country doctors, several of whom were my close friends during the years that followed.

If the city doctor's life is often considered a hard one, how much more so is the country doctor's. I have often been out with him on his rounds, and have seen just what he has to contend with. The country doctor is usually located in some small prairie town, the centre of a widely scattered farming community. From this point he must make long weary drives to isolated spots, often facing severe bodily discomfort and hardship, to minister to the sick under conditions that often do not admit of even the most ordinary conveniences for the proper exercise of his skill, and under conditions which also, to say the least, usually test his courage and his powers of endurance to the utmost.

Many farm homes on the prairies are poorly equipped; even the best of them are seldom equipped for the emergency of sickness. The general lack of electricity, running water, and even adequate space, are some of the conditions with which he has to cope practically all the time.

I myself was once in a home where there was but one single room, and in this room, in the middle of winter,

and in the presence of several other children, a woman was delivered of a baby. It was too cold to send the little ones outside, so they were herded into a corner, as far away from the scene of the birth as possible. There I attempted to hold their attention while the doctor and the woman's husband administered to her.

The large double bed sagged so badly in the middle that the doctor found it impossible to continue his work properly. Ignoring the husband's protests, he finally had the patient moved onto the kitchen table, where, after an hour or so, she was finally successfully delivered of a husky male child. All her other children, by the way, had been born without the services of either a doctor or a nurse. Two days following this birth, against the doctor's orders, the mother was up and about again. Apparently she suffered no ill effects, either.

I know of another doctor who drove out in the middle of a blinding snowstorm to attend a sick patient. He was hours and hours on the road and had to change teams three times. He finally arrived at his destination, some twenty miles from town, almost exhausted, only to find that an immediate operation was necessary.

The patient was too sick to be moved into town. So the operation was performed right there—again on the kitchen table! When it was all over, and he was confident that his patient was resting comfortably, the doctor returned to town. Every day for a week he drove out to see his patient, and as the man was an old bachelor homesteader, not only did the doctor have to minister to him

as a patient but he also cleaned up his place, cooked his meals and washed his dishes for him as well.

The country doctor is almost always a poor man. It seems a strange thing, but there appears to be some perverse streak in almost all human beings—and this apparently applies to city and country people alike—that makes them put off the day of reckoning with their good friend, the doctor, until the last possible moment and sometimes, it is to be confessed, for ever. This is particularly true in the case of the rural doctor in Western Canada, who usually has to depend very largely upon the condition of the crops for his income.

"If I could only collect half the accounts due to me," Dr. Smyth once said to me, "I would be quite comfortably well off. Instead, I have quite a hard time to get along at all." And he waved an expressive hand around the bare little office, part of his own dwelling house, in which we were sitting.

Yet Dr. Symth, and hundreds of others like him, would never refuse a call for help, in any weather and under any conditions, from even the man who owed them the most.

I recall the case of a Stettler doctor who died some years ago, leaving his widow in almost destitute circumstances despite the fact that he had always enjoyed a large and ever-increasing practice. At his funeral, one of the largest crowds I have ever seen gathered to pay homage to his long and worthy record. The coffin was literally covered with flowers, and many were the compliments that were bestowed upon his memory. Something

more tangible than flowers and compliments, I thought, was necessary in that case. To this day his family have suffered from the thoughtlessness, and in some cases the actual selfishness, of those who had so often benefitted by his help.

Many indeed are the unrecorded romances, the unwritten tragedies—and comedies, too, thank heaven—that surround the figure of the Canadian country doctor. Many are the splendid examples of unconscious heroism and courage that go unremarked, unrewarded and unsung. Glad are we, in Western Canada, to see that a great industry—in the filming of Doctor Dafoe of Collander, Ontario, and the famous “quints”—has accorded him the warm appreciation and recognition he so richly deserves.

Freddie's death was my first encounter with tragedy. It was my first real grief. I had loved the little boy very deeply. Every one had loved him, and I am quite sure that I do not exaggerate when I say that practically the entire countryside, little as they knew us at that time, was saddened at the news of his untimely passing.

We brought the little body home to the farm and laid it tenderly in a darkened room. Then we set about the sad business of making arrangements for the funeral.

There was an undertaker in Big Valley in those days who combined the sale of furniture and the running of a jazz orchestra with his more sombre occupation. He offered to sell us a coffin for two hundred dollars. We

considered this to be an outrageous sum to demand for the crêpe-covered, ornate-looking atrocity he wished to foist upon us. We decided to make our own. Accordingly, my husband inquired around town and finally found an Old Country carpenter, who offered to construct a simple coffin for us at a reasonable price.

We bought some fine two-inch thick oak lumber and from this the plain casket was made. It was lined with soft white silk, and the fine wood was waxed and polished by our own loving hands until it shone like glass.

I dressed Freddie in the linen suit that he had worn at school in Hawaii, and put his toy sword and some of his more precious playthings in alongside of him. Around his neck I hung an orange paper *lei*, and a cross of *leis*, symbol of the country in which he had been born, was tacked on the outside of the coffin. This was literally covered with wild flowers gathered and placed thereon by his schoolmates.

At two o'clock the sad procession started from our house. One of the men drove the democrat bearing the small coffin, and slowly and solemnly the cars, democrats and buggies, containing people from all over the countryside, followed, wending their sorrowful way towards the little church on the brow of the hill.

The funeral service was simple but impressive, and presently we were all standing in the square graveyard lot near-by, with its few unadorned mounds, and Freddie's coffin was being lowered carefully into the newly dug grave.

The young minister's voice repeated the words of the service, "Ashes to ashes . . . earth to earth . . .," the gravel rattled against the oaken box, and sadly we turned away, leaving the dear little boy, who had been born beneath a kindly tropic sun, to sleep beneath the colder skies of a strange land.

From the cemetery we returned home. There were the usual chores of the day still to be done. Pigs and chickens to be fed, cows to be milked, meals to prepare and to clear away. We had to go through with them as if nothing had happened. And no doubt it was a very good thing for us that we had. I suspect that many a grieving, sorrowing soul has been comforted and sustained by the sheer necessity of performing familiar and humdrum domestic tasks such as these.

Gradually I recovered from the shock and pain of little Freddie's death. Not only was there much routine work for me to do, but there was also the necessity for me to begin definite preparations for my forthcoming confinement.

The months between July and October passed uneventfully. I was in splendid health and managed to do my work and get about pretty much as usual until it was time for me to go away. I had decided to go to Edmonton to the hospital. Our house was altogether too crowded with people for me to try to make any arrangements at home. In Edmonton I had an old friend, who had lived on the same street with me in London, and who was now married

to a Canadian, the Principal of one of Edmonton's high schools. With her I would stay until the moment came to enter the hospital.

The anticipated date for my baby's arrival dawned, but the baby did not put in its appearance according to schedule. When a few more days had passed uneventfully, the doctor decided that something must be wrong, and that it would be necessary to "hurry things up" by an induced labour.

I accordingly entered the hospital on the night of October 6, 1921, perfectly well and, curiously enough, far more interested in than scared at the prospect of the unknown ordeal that confronted me. I had just passed through the experience of death. Now I was going to pass through the experience of producing life. It was, too, a reversal of the natural process to have the exact date of one's baby's arrival deliberately arranged instead of having it make its own sometimes sudden and embarrassing arrival unheralded.

Very early next morning I was carefully prepared for the operating table. I was pushed out on a stretcher into the elevator, swiftly carried up to the top floor, and conveyed into that modern chamber of horrors—a white-tiled operating room. Around me were an amazing array of implements and many masked and hooded attendants, all of them in a blaze of light whiter than any sun. A few whispered orders from the doctor, and the sickly odour of an anæsthetic above my nostrils. Then—oblivion.

I came out of that drugged sleep into a reality of the most terrible agony I had ever known. A blinding, racking torture that left me barely breathing space between each fresh onslaught with which to brace myself against another. . . . A pain that racked and ground and tore, incessantly, hour after hour, through all that interminable, never-ending day.

Has any one ever explained the necessity for the extraordinary agony of childbirth, I wonder? That it is essential to a mother's love for her child, I cannot believe. Under certain circumstances, as when the Caesarean operation is performed, for instance, before the onset of labour, the delivery is painless. Yet who ever heard of a mother who was less devoted to her child on that account? No, I cannot believe that it has any effect on one's love for one's child. Perhaps, however, as the old philosophers have suggested, it may, "through its cleansing power, enhance the miracle."

Before complete exhaustion finally claimed me, I was mercifully put to sleep again, taken into the delivery room, and there the baby was artificially extracted. I awoke the next time to a slow realization that the pain was over. Birth had been accomplished.

At first I was too weak to wonder whether the baby was a boy or a girl. Presently, however, a nurse was bending solicitously over my bed. I saw that I was in a large, sunny room, with dimity curtains fluttering at the windows. I felt incredibly light-headed, but light-hearted, too.

"You have a little daughter," the nurse told me, quietly.

A daughter! "Can I see her?" I asked, weakly.

"In a little while. But you must not excite yourself. You have had a very trying time."

Yes, I had. I hadn't believed that there was so much pain in the world. I hadn't believed that I could possibly endure it. But I had done so, and thousands upon thousands of women had gone through similar experiences, not once but many times. Now, like them, I had my baby as a reward for it.

Presently they brought her to me. The little Canadian! A tiny, dark-haired girl, with waxen fingers and waxen, pink-tinted cheeks. Like a tiny doll, so warm and soft, so strangely wise-looking.

My husband came in then and bent tenderly over us both. There were tears in his eyes and his face was white and haggard-looking.

"I'm all right now," I assured him, happily. "Look at her! Isn't she sweet?"

"Yes, dear," he said, and it seemed to me that his voice broke on the words.

For a few ecstatic moments I knew complete happiness. I felt myself to be one with Harry and the new baby, one with the entire world. Peace and power and understanding surged through me.

But what brief bliss and joy were mine! My baby, although I did not learn it until some time afterwards, had been injured internally during her difficult passage into the world. She could not possibly live.

They let me regain some of my own strength before breaking the unbelievable news to me. Everything had been done to stem the internal hemorrhages that were draining the tiny life away. Everything was still being done. But there was absolutely no hope.

On the third day, I held my baby in my arms, alive, for the last time. Then they took her away. I never saw her again.

It is impossible for me to describe the anguish that was now mine. I could not cry. I did not cry even when finally, after a comparatively brief convalescence at my friend's home, I returned to my own home at Fenn. It was not until months afterwards that the stemmed-up tide of tears was loosened and I was at last released from that awful, stony grief.

Even to this day I ask myself why it all should have been. Why, after the long period of waiting, the weariness and discomfort, the terrible hours of physical suffering, I should have nothing. It all seemed so terribly unjust and unfair. Other babies lived—babies that were not wanted, babies for whom there was no hope of a future. Why had mine been taken?

It was a long time before I could bear to look upon the tiny garments I had so happily prepared a short while before. At last, however, with many bitter tears, I packed them all carefully away, determined never to touch them again until I could bring them forth to clothe a living child.

The memory of the baby was laid away in heart's

fragrant lavender. Although I have never been able to think of her, poor little Joan Margaret, without the desire to weep, at least the stabbing pain of the bitter experience has long since passed away, and life has brought me blessings in abundance—in the present comfort of three beautiful living children—to compensate me for that first unhappy summer at Fenn.



Seventeen

We had been thinking of extending our farming operations to include poultry raising, and it was perhaps a good thing for me that in the spring of 1922 we did this. I had now completely recovered my good health but I was still very low in spirits. A new interest, Harry felt, would keep me busy and take my thoughts away from myself.

Our venture into pedigreed chickens was the result of our brief visit to the Calgary Exhibition just before Freddie's death. My husband and I had paused before the Dominion Poultry exhibit and had fallen into conversation with the gentleman in charge of it.

"How many chickens have you on the farm?" he had asked.

"Oh, I should think about fifty," had been Harry's reply.

"Good gracious! You don't even know the exact number!" His tone had been decidedly disapproving. "What breed are they?"

"Well, there are some brown ones, and some white ones, and a few black and white ones, and some that seem

to be a mixture of all three," Harry admitted, with a smile.

"You must have a terrible flock," he commented. Then he went on hopefully: "Are you interested in getting some really good stuff? How would you like the chickens to keep the farm instead of the farm keeping the chickens, as it appears to be doing at present?"

We said we were interested, so he went on to explain all about it.

"If you like I'll come to your place and take a look around and see what can be done about getting you started."

We said we would like it very much indeed, so during the winter months he had paid us a visit, with one of his assistants, and had gone very thoroughly into the proposition with us.

The result had been a wholesale slaughter of our existing flock, the installation of a new one in its place, and the erection of the first really modern chicken house in the district.

This chicken house, built to accommodate some seventy-five pullets, was built according to Government-approved specifications and plans. These plans have been changed and improved many times since then, but that first house of ours was such a vast improvement over anything that existed anywhere around that it caused a great deal of interest and excitement in the district. Later we built a second and much larger house. This had a feed room at one end and we intended to add another wing eventually

and thus make the building large enough for some six hundred birds, which was about the limit we intended to keep.

Inspired by our example, several of our neighbours very soon after went into the chicken business themselves, some of them on a much larger scale.

Our poultry houses were equipped with "trapnests" so that all our birds could be entered in the Dominion Record of Performance Test. Trapnesting, I must explain, is a process by which an accurate record of each hen's performance can be ascertained. The bird enters a nest equipped with a trapdoor, which trips and falls behind her as she enters, imprisoning her inside. After she has laid her egg, she is carefully lifted out, the ring band on her leg examined, her number marked on the egg and also on a proper record sheet. In this fashion accurate records of each hen's performance can be kept for any number of years and one can very quickly weed out undesirables and identify the best layers. The official record sheets for the Record of Performance Test were sent in every week to the Dominion Poultry Department at Ottawa. All birds that laid over one hundred and fifty eggs in one year obtained a Certificate of Merit. Those that laid over two hundred eggs were granted an Advance Certificate.

Naturally we reserved all the best and highest-laying birds for our own breeding operations, offering for sale only the best of the excess. Some of our cockerels were of such excellent quality and pedigree that we had no difficulty whatever in getting as high as twenty-five dollars

for a single bird. We never sold one for less than five and, as had been the case with seeds, we received far more orders than we could possibly fill.

For our initial stock we chose Barred Plymouth Rocks, a greyish-looking bird, with black and white bars on its feathers, and known as an all-round serviceable breed. Part of the initial stock came from Eastern Canada—from the Ontario Agricultural College at Guelph—and part from Western Canada—from the University of British Columbia. By this combination we hoped to combine the good points of both eastern and western birds.

The actual breeding operations were really the most interesting part of the work and these were largely in my hands. It was work that I really enjoyed, however, and I never begrudged the time and effort I was forced to spend on the baby chicks, from the time they arrived until they turned into mature hens.

Since we knew nothing whatever about incubating, we decided to set a trial hatch a little before the actual breeding season began. We therefore put fifty eggs into the machine—a two hundred-and-fifty-egg Buckeye—and anxiously awaited results.

Unfortunately the lamp went out on the eighteenth day and remained out for several hours without our knowledge. The eggs were consequently chilled and only a few of them hatched out at all. Only one solitary chick survived. Harry wanted to kill it right away, but I was too tender-hearted, and begged to be allowed to try and raise it myself as a sort of pet. I made a bed for the

little fellow in a shoe box lined with cotton wool. It was kept in a warm spot by the kitchen stove.

To every one's amazement—and annoyance—the miserable little creature did not die, but thrived and grew. Sometimes, in the middle of the night, when the fire had died down and the kitchen had become cold, he would waken and start an incessant peeping, loud enough to arouse the entire household. Naturally he was far from popular with the hired men, and, indeed, the entire family thought me completely crazy to bother with him at all.

Eventually "Chickie," as we had christened him, grew up to be quite a large cockerel. He had plenty of spirit and became a regular "cock of the walk"—lording it over the other chicks, as they came along, in truly autocratic fashion.

At last, however, he met with what I suppose were his just deserts for such behaviour. He had been worrying the life out of a bunch of new cockerels, pecking at them and chasing them around the yard until they were almost exhausted. One exceptionally sturdy little fellow suddenly turned and flew at him, and there ensued one of the fiercest fights I had ever set eyes on. Feathers flew, blood spurted. When the end finally came, Chickie was completely beaten. After a few futile attempts to stand on his legs, he fell backward, crumpled into a heap and died. I alone mourned his passing.

Our first real hatch was encouragingly successful, despite the disaster of the trial one. While the eggs were

in the incubator, we spent most of our time running down into the basement to see if the lamp was working properly and that everything was as it should be. We were not going to run the risk of accidents this time, if we could possibly help it.

On about the twentieth day we heard the first faint sounds of peeping inside the machine. At this stage we could hardly bring ourselves to leave the incubator at all. Through the small glass window we could see the eggs cracking, one by one, and the tiny beaks of the chicks appearing. Soon there were some dozen or more of the fluffy little creatures crowding against the glass.

When the hatch was complete we removed the chicks and counted them. We found we had lost a few through natural causes, and one or two of them proved to be cripples, but on the whole it was a sixty per cent hatch of good, strong, live chicks, a very good percentage for beginners.

The incubator was cleaned out and we set our second hatch. With this one we started our pedigreeing operations.

Pedigreeing work with baby chicks is a very complicated business. As I have already explained, all the eggs were numbered as they came from the hens. These numbered eggs, on the eighteenth day, were placed in small cheese-cloth sacks, two or three eggs from the same hen being placed together in one sack. The sacks were tied up and labelled with the number of the mother hen, and the chicks naturally hatched out inside the bags and remained

there until we removed them from the incubator at the end of hatching proceedings.

This placing of the eggs in the little sacks we found to be a difficult and tiresome process. At first we put them into the bags in the basement, but we found that very often, on account of the time it took to do it, the eggs got chilled and we lost chicks because of it. Finally I conceived the idea of heating the entire kitchen up to a temperature of some one hundred and two degrees, about the same as the interior of the incubator, and performing the work there. We would bring up trayfuls of eggs and set them on the kitchen table, where we worked over them comfortably, with greater assurance of accuracy, and without any fear of the eggs becoming chilled.

For brooder houses we used granaries, twelve feet square. We lined the outside of these buildings with tar paper and the inside with brown building paper, rounded off at the corners to prevent the chicks from crowding. A false roof was constructed of the building paper at a height of some five feet six inches from the floor, thus conserving the heat. This roof had an opening in the centre of it, some eighteen inches square, covered with pieces of lath and a few inches of straw. Its purpose was for ventilation. Two glass windows, also each about eighteen inches square, were let into the south side of the house and another, covered with cloth instead of glass, was cut in the door.

We used coal-burning brooder stoves, with steel canopies, each having a capacity of about one thousand two

hundred and fifty chicks. I discovered, however, that we could safely handle only some five hundred chicks under brooders of this size. I always kept the stoves hot enough to achieve a temperature of eighty degrees in the farthest corners of the room. Keeping the brooder houses uniformly hot, I found, was one of the most important factors in the successful raising of baby chicks.

We used to transport the chicks from the incubators across the yard to the brooder houses in clothes-baskets lined with warm blankets. It took at least three people to perform the final operation, which was the releasing of the chicks from the little bags and the recording of their individual ancestry.

The three of us would sit on the floor of the brooder house with the basket of chicks in front of us. One person would untie a bag and carefully hand over each chick to the second person, who clamped a numbered band on its leg, at the same time announcing the number of the egg and the number of the leg band. This information was carefully taken down in a book by the third person. In about three weeks' time these leg bands had to be removed and wing bands substituted. This again was a lengthy process, necessitating careful and accurate recording. Fortunately the wing bands remained on the chickens for the rest of their lives.

The actual feeding and management of the baby chicks took a great deal of my time. Fortunately I had good help in the kitchen at that period, so I was able to devote myself practically entirely to it.

After much experimenting with various published formulas, I finally evolved my own feeding system, and it seemed to prove very successful indeed. For the first forty-eight hours of their lives I gave the chicks nothing more substantial than fresh water and a little sour milk or buttermilk. At the end of this time I gave them a feeding of sand and charcoal on little paper plates, following this with a small feeding of chick scratch grain.

Starting with the second week I fed them a dry mash, which replaced two of the scratch grain feedings. I experimented with different kinds of home-made mashes, such as chopped up eggs, tomato juice, and so forth, but all these things were finally discarded in favour of a good commercial chick mash fed dry.

This system of feeding produced large, healthy birds, seldom troubled with disease. In fact, the only time we were troubled on this account was through an accident and not through any fault of feeding or treatment. One night there was a very high wind and the stoves burned up quickly and then died down before morning, thus cooling the houses off before we could attend to the fires. Very shortly after this many of the chicks showed signs of sickness. I did not know what it was at first and tried to doctor them myself. I even walled off a little space in the brooder house and made a sort of hospital for the sick birds, trying every means that I could think of to get them well again. But they died off rapidly and more and more sickened every day.

At last, in desperation, we sent to Edmonton for one of the Government poultry experts. This gentleman came down post-haste and pronounced immediately that our flock had contracted the dreaded "white diarrhoea."

I shall never forget the wholesale slaughter that ensued. Poor man! I never could find it in my heart to like him again, although I knew he was doing the right thing, the only thing possible under the circumstances. In my eyes he was little short of a murderer. It seemed to be so terribly cruel, this callous killing off of dozens and dozens of soft, fluffy little creatures, not one of whom I could have found it in my heart to handle so ruthlessly myself. However, after the sick and infected birds had all been removed, and the houses thoroughly cleaned and disinfected, the epidemic died right down and we never had a return of it.

For the first two weeks of their lives I used to keep the little chicks penned around the stove at night with pieces of board. The area inside this circle, within which the chicks slept, was covered with sacks. In the morning these sacks were removed, with the night droppings of the birds, and in this way the floor around the stove was kept clean and sweet. For litter I used chopped up straw or alfalfa and this was removed and the entire house disinfected every week.

I let the little chicks out into the open air on the third day, weather permitting. When they were about eight weeks old I dispensed with the stoves altogether. The chicks remained in the brooder houses, without heat, until

they were old enough to be removed to the large permanent laying houses in the fall.

Our main object, with all this complicated breeding work, was to produce hens with high egg-laying ability. Very soon, however, we struck a snag.

The old-fashioned barn-yard hen, so much derided by commercial poultrymen of today, lays from sixty to one hundred eggs a year, each egg usually of fairly good size and firm shell. She is capable of rustling for her living and when the spring comes she will cheerfully steal to a nest away off in the brush, lay some thirteen to fourteen eggs, and in due time appear the proud mother of some thirteen to fourteen sturdy chicks. Or, to be exact, one chick per egg, all of which chicks will invariably live and thrive and grow up to be respectable and hardy birds. After a few years of such performances she makes a very acceptable meal for two or three people.

Man, however, in his wisdom, or lack of it, decided some time ago that the barn-yard hen was inefficient and must be made to lay more eggs. He promptly went to work and proceeded to breed and select for this particular purpose. Skilful breeders accomplished what they had gone after and today a hen in a commercial egg plant that lays less than two hundred and fifty eggs per year usually meets with a sudden and drastic end via the soup pot.

We soon found, as others had done before us, that it requires a large amount of effort to maintain high-laying ability and a large-sized egg and at the same time main-

tain the health and vigour of the hen. It is almost impossible to include also high fertility of the egg and livability of the resulting chick, so that instead of getting large eggs and one hundred chicks from one hundred eggs, or a hundred per cent hatch such as is usually attained by the common barn-yard hen, the poultryman is happy if he can get moderate-sized eggs and from sixty to seventy per cent of a hatch, and the chicks have to be wet-nursed day and night in order to keep them alive. As for this commercial "egg-producing machine"—when she reaches the end of her laying career she is hardly fit to make a meal for one person. Such is the price that has been paid for the high-laying egg producer.

We also started a small turkey flock, but it did not prove, in our case at any rate, to be a very profitable or practicable undertaking. Turkeys are difficult to raise and they are voracious wheat-eaters.

"One turkey, one acre of wheat," Mr. Aunger laughingly told me one day, and I soon proved it to be almost literally true. So after one season we gave them up and let our neighbours worry about them instead.



Eighteen

We were so encouraged by the success of our efforts in the production of registered wheat that we decided to launch out and extend our seed-growing activities to the raising of seed oats, barley and other grains.

Almost from the very start we were fortunate enough to make a contract with the Canada Malting Company to grow Elite and first generation seed for them of a special strain of malting barley and for many years thereafter we enjoyed pleasant and profitable relations with this company.

We also started a field of alfalfa seed, and with this we did fairly well on a small scale. We soon discovered, however, that we could not possibly compete, on our sort of land at any rate, with the high yields enjoyed by those working under the direction of experts.

Another venture, begun that year, was an attempt to produce the seed of a new variety of flax, known as J.W.S., for the Government of Northern Ireland. Such inroads into the sale of Irish linen were being made by the cheapness of silk, and by the increase in the use of artificial silk,

that an Irish flax expert had been impelled to develop a higher-yielding flax plant, which it was hoped would increase the flax yield per acre and so decrease the cost of linen cloth, thus enabling it to be sold at a cheaper price and compete with silk, or at least with cotton.

The difficulty was, however, that "J.W.S." would hardly mature and produce seed in Northern Ireland. In seeking for a district where the production of it could be properly managed, our farm received a recommendation, and in due course we were provided with sufficient seed to put in a few acres for experimental purposes.

We were given a very glowing picture—and a perfectly truthful one, too—of the possibilities of this flax. We were assured a price of five dollars a bushel. This was twice the value of ordinary Canadian flax.

We very soon discovered, however, that while our good friends in Northern Ireland had told us the truth about the plant—that it outyielded the flax at present being grown in Ireland—they had not told us *all* the truth. For their part, it must be said, they probably had not known it. The truth was that the yield of this particular seed to the acre was less than half that of the Canadian variety!

During the growing season we received a visit from a most interesting individual, the Flax and Potato Commissioner of Northern Ireland. He was a veritable giant of a man, standing some six feet seven or so in height, and had to bend down in order to pass through most of the doors on our farm.

He was very well pleased with the appearance of our field of flax and went into paroxysms of enthusiastic admiration over a field of potatoes we were growing alongside of it. It was, he said, one of the finest-looking fields of potatoes he had ever seen. What variety were we growing?

"You should know," we told him. "Those are the most popular Irish variety. They are Irish Cobblers."

"Irish Cobblers!" he exclaimed. "Never heard of them. Let's go down and take a look at them."

We went down to the field and dug up some of the potatoes for him to examine. He looked them over but said nothing. That night we cooked some. We waited anxiously for his verdict. In Canada they were considered to be the very highest quality of eating potatoes procurable.

"I think," he said at length, "that you have here a reasonably good pig feed. Man alive," he went on, "if you want to see potatoes that are real potatoes, you must come to Ireland and see those we grow for our own tables. Not those we sell to the English, who, of course, know nothing of what a real potato is like."

He went away and with him went our enthusiasm for Irish Cobblers and for J.W.S. flax. We grew it for one season more but found that it was not a profitable undertaking. We accordingly devoted our attention to something else.

This something else was the production of lawn and golf green grasses—of the varieties Velvet Bent and Creeping Red Fescue. Our experience with them was

perhaps the most interesting of all. In a short time we were supposed to have the largest artificially cultivated fields of genuine Velvet Bent and genuine Creeping Red Fescue on the American continent.

As soon as it became known that we were growing these grasses for seed, we were literally bombarded with requests from golf clubs and seed houses, from New York and other large centres, for seeds of these grasses at practically any price we liked to name. We actually did sell some of our material at seven dollars and fifty cents a pound and that first year our small plots produced at the rate of some three hundred pounds to the acre.

We thought we had at last found the way to make our fortune on the farm. As many others had done in the past under similar circumstances, we decided to apply ourselves to the immediate enlargement of our fields. We hoarded the seed like gold and refused to sell it at any price and worked over it with the most painstaking care. We finally had some fifty acres in these two grasses in crop.

One year the president and secretary of one of the largest and most exclusive grass seed houses in New York came all the way from that city to make us a personal visit and to examine our fields. Both gentlemen were exceedingly excited at the condition of the plants when they saw them in June. They offered us a fat advance payment down on their order. This, fortunately, we refused, for my husband had scruples about taking money till he had, as he considered, really earned it.

There seemed to be no cloud on our prospective financial sky. We took pencil and paper and multiplied fifty acres by three hundred pounds to the acre, and multiplied this in turn by seven dollars and fifty cents, and foresaw the almost incredible sum of \$110,000 to be derived from our forthcoming crop of this one material alone.

Again and again we figured it, and then, to be quite safe, we cut the total in two. We carefully debated how much of the seed we would keep for ourselves. How much land could we hire from our neighbours next year to increase our acreage? And so on and so forth. . . .

Fortunately we made no commitments.

For, alas and alack, we were doomed to the most terrible and devastating disappointment. The seed usually began to come into evidence about the middle of July. The particular year of which I write, no blossoms appeared at all. Still, however, the plants continued to grow vigorously.

When harvest time came, there was hardly any seed at all. To our utter amazement and dismay, the field of fifty acres, instead of developing the fifteen thousand pounds of seed which we had reasonably expected it to do, produced only a meagre twenty pounds from the entire field. Naturally we had to cancel our contract with the seed house.

There ensued a feverish search, by correspondence with all the known authorities, to find out what could possibly be the reason for this extraordinary and unexpected failure

of the plants to set to seed. Could anything be done about it, we wanted to know? Might not the same thing happen another year?

The Dominion Seed Commissioner, who had supplied us with the original seed, recommended that we interview the original selector of the grasses, who was reputed to be the discoverer of Velvet Bent. The only consolation we got was that these things "sometimes happened," and that "no known method was available for making any plants set to seed." He merely advised us to keep on and see what the future would bring forth.

To make a long story short, for two years more we did keep on growing these grasses, building up hopes each year only to see them dashed to the ground at harvest time. For three years running we had hardly any seed at all. Finally we decided that we could not afford to leave the land indefinitely in such an unproductive and unremunerative and uncertain crop, so most reluctantly we ploughed it all up and put it back into oats. Thus vanished a dream of quick and easy riches.

Some time after this my husband happened to meet an official of the Forestry Department of the Dominion Government, to whom he recounted our experience.

"That is a strange thing," was the interested comment of this gentleman. "Because, you see, most of the trees in the forests did not set to seed during those same years that your grasses did not. The reason we do not know."

We ourselves knew, however, that we had seen a theoretical yearly income of \$110,000 vanish into thin

air. We had received, too, a short and sharp lesson that farming is not a business in which to get rich quick.

Two other ventures, which turned out unsuccessfully, were with wild white clover and a certain medicinal herb seed, both of which at first promised profitable results.

Of the wild white clover we had been told that it was easy to grow and would always fetch a good price. In England, for instance, they would pay as much as twenty-five shillings a pound for it.

We grew it very carefully for a couple of years and finally had one hundred pounds of seed for sale. This we offered to a British seed house at five dollars a pound. To our surprise the British people offered us only fifty cents a pound for it, because, they said, having grown it in a field by itself, and carefully cultivated it, it was no longer wild white clover. We had tamed it! Clover was only wild when it was grown in competition with many other grasses, so that it could demonstrate its strength and its ability to survive. For the tame clover we now had, fifty cents was the correct price.

The medicinal herb seed had been given to us by a friend. He told us to keep the field perfectly clean because for very pure seed there would be a high price. There were some bad weed seeds in it, he said, and we must carefully rogue these out.

He came up around harvest time and took a look at it.

"What have you done?" he exclaimed. "That isn't my herb seed at all!"

We found that we had carefully weeded out the herb

and left a wonderful crop of some noxious weed we had never seen before in its place.

The cleanings from the different varieties of grain we were now growing provided us with a mass of material for which there was no profitable sale. We decided, therefore, to invest in some hogs. These, with the chickens, would consume all the waste.

We first bought some purebred Tamworths—several sows and a good boar. The Tamworths had been recommended to us as a lean bacon breed, well suited to the country, and so we decided to try our luck with them.

I shall never forget the arrival of the first litter. One of the sows was due to farrow on a certain night. My husband was so concerned about the prospective event that he made a point of sitting up with her in case she might need some assistance. He sat up all night, but the little pigs did not put in their appearance. He sat up the second night, but still they did not come. The third night he was so tired and cross that he fell asleep on the couch in the living-room and forgot all about them.

In the morning when he woke up and went out to the pen he found that the sow had safely delivered herself of ten husky piglets, all of them sound and well and blissfully suckling at her side. Leave nature alone, you see, and she will usually take her own course quite successfully.

A friend in England also arranged to have a herd of pigs brought over to us from England, of a breed that we had heard should do well in Canada. These were the Large Blacks.

Ten sows and two boars came out in charge of a young Englishman who was to look after them for us. This young man was from a good country family and came out to Canada more for the adventure of the thing than anything else. He was the typical "green" Englishman but very good-natured and sociable, and, despite his Oxford accent and his amazing assortment of fancy waistcoats, riding breeks, high leather boots, brilliant socks and suits, he was very popular with all the other hired men. He bore the somewhat unfortunate name of Percival, but this was soon changed by his companions to simple George, and as George he was known to the end of his stay.

This young chap did not remain with us very long, for he was called home to England shortly after his arrival to take up an inheritance that had come to him. His place was filled by another Englishman, Captain R. F. Fisher, an old Haileyburnian and seasoned Army veteran, who had seen service in Egypt and the Soudan—a tall, loose-limbed, neatly-moustached Britisher, slightly stooping as if to deprecate his unusual height, with a brown lined face and kindly grey eyes.

Captain Fisher, to a surprising degree, carried with him the very best attributes and traits of the better-class English county family, and his quiet but forceful influence on the lives of those about him did very much towards making English people more respected and liked than they had been in the past in our own particular community. He did his work—unpleasant work, caring for pigs—quietly

and thoroughly. His unfailing good humour and his extraordinary love for children, soon endeared him to all hearts. Strange how this type of Englishman can almost unfailingly slip gracefully and easily into any set of circumstances in any part of the world.

To return to the Large Blacks. The most conspicuous feature of the Large Black pig was its enormous ears, which flopped over and almost completely covered its face. The little pigs, almost exact replicas of their mothers in miniature, were the funniest things imaginable—all ears.

We did very well with these Large Blacks until we again struck a snag to our progress. We needed new breeding stock from the Old Country and wrote for some to be sent out. To our consternation we were informed that owing to the foot and mouth disease, then prevalent in England, no more exportations of these pigs would be permitted for some considerable time to come.

Our breeding work with the Large Black's consequently came to a standstill, and finally we were forced to drop them altogether and continue to breed the Tamworths alone, not as a commercial undertaking, as we had planned with the Large Blacks, but merely for our household use. One of our neighbours told us that we had "some Tamworths and some Tam-worthless pigs."

I must confess quite frankly that I always had an aversion to eating anything that we had raised ourselves, particularly those creatures that I myself had had an intimate part in bringing to life and caring for. I could not bear to see a chicken killed, and it was always a

sickening job for me to have to pluck and dress them for the table, though I have cleaned, cooked and eaten, without the slightest feeling of concern, chickens whose origin I did not know. There was actually only one bird on the farm that I did take real pleasure in eating, and that was a certain vicious old cock bird, who attacked me every time I went into the chicken house. I was not at all sad when his demise was ordained, nor did I experience my usual sensations of nausea when I popped him, nicely stuffed, into the oven for our mid-day meal. I was really enjoying a sort of revenge.

As for the pigs, I never liked them very much, nor had very much to do with them, but for all that I found it difficult to enjoy eating those we had raised ourselves, however succulent the meat might be.

There was one sow that became quite friendly with me. When I called Molly-o she would come trundling up to me and nose about my feet. It is likely that she merely associated my voice with the prospect of food, but I used to tell myself that she really had a glimmering of intelligence and did know her own name and recognized my voice when I called to her. She would even follow me round the yard, snorting and snuffling, and looking up at me with her little piggy eyes in such a trusting fashion that I became quite attached to her.

When I learned that Molly was on the butcher list I felt really heartsick. I knew I would never be able to eat a morsel of her meat and it would be an awful undertaking to have to fix her up—to render down the lard,

salt the good cuts, smoke the bacon and hams, and to make the usual brawn or headcheese from the trimmings. I made such a fuss about the whole business that Harry at last compromised by arranging an exchange with one of our neighbours, who happened to be contemplating the killing of a pig about the same time. The exchange was duly effected and after a while I forgot all about poor Molly.

One Sunday, some time later, we were invited to dinner at the home of a neighbour, and during the course of the meal, I found myself complimenting our host on the excellent ham we were eating.

"It ought to be good," Bob exclaimed, with a grin. "It was one of your own pigs."

I looked down at my plate in horror. Suddenly it dawned on me. I had eaten Molly after all.



Nineteen

The fall of 1923 was a very momentous one for us and for our community, as well as for our Province of Alberta and, indeed, for the whole Dominion of Canada.

That year the district of Fenn had enjoyed one of the best crops in its farming history. Almost perfect conditions had prevailed throughout the growing season, and not only was the crop an unusually large one in quantity but it was excellent in quality as well. Even to the most inexperienced eye the wheat was extraordinarily hard, even, and of a good red colour—three qualities that are seldom enjoyed at one and the same time in any one year.

We decided to make a special effort to win high prizes at the Chicago International Show. We had the good grain. We had discovered, too, that there is a special technique to exhibiting. We had learned, for instance, that it is necessary, among other things, to *hand pick* one's final sample.

First of all we took about a hundred bushels each of both wheat and peas from the best-looking fields we had. For some reason we did not show oats that year, nor any other grains.

The wheat and peas were run through the Marot cleaner several times and reduced to about five bushels of each. The five bushels were then run through the hand-grading machine. What was left from this operation, about a bushel, was taken, a plateful at a time, and gone over with the naked eye. All discoloured, shrunken, and off-type kernels that remained were carefully eliminated, leaving the final sample—a peck—as nearly perfect as the human eye could make it.

So far, so good. But could we not, I demanded, improve even on nature's own handiwork?

After some thought, I conceived the idea of polishing the grain a little. First I tried making bags of silk and rubbing the grain in them. But that took too long and was not as satisfactory as might be desired. At last I decided to try a little scheme of my own by which I lined a barrel churn first with flannel, then with silk, put the grain into it and swished it gently around.

The family laughed at me but they permitted me to make the experiment. When the grain was taken out, it looked beautiful. The peas, indeed, looked like pearls—almost too beautiful to be real.

We used this churn idea every year for some years thereafter. In good years the grain really didn't need polishing at all, but in poor years I think it did make an improvement to its appearance. In 1923, had we but realized it, the grain had a natural sheen that no amount of polishing was needed to enhance.

 We waited until the very last moment before shipping the samples. They were gone over again and again.

While the sacks were being made ready, I gave the churn, still loaded with wheat, a final turn or two. What was my horror and consternation when the lid of the churn suddenly fell off. All the precious wheat kernels, of course, poured out onto the living-room floor.

Harry was simply frantic. He was furious with me, although it was really not my fault at all. He was furious with everybody. He believed that all our work was undone, for it was too late to go over the wheat again and the whole peck of it was scattered to the four corners of the room. There was nothing to do but to sweep it up, hastily scan it for foreign particles, weigh it and put it into the sack.

Both sacks were hurriedly labelled and tied and my husband started off to Fenn with them. About a mile from the railway depot, the wheel suddenly came off the buggy he was driving. Harry almost wept. In the distance he could hear the whistle of the approaching train. There was not a soul in sight on the road, not a house near-by. And he just had to get the samples off on that particular train or else they would arrive too late to take part in the competition.

Frantically he jumped out of the buggy, pushed it on to the side of the road, tied the team to a fence post, and set out on foot to *run* for the train with the sacks on his shoulder.

The last few yards, it was a race between him and the

engine. He managed to get to the station, however, just in time to throw the sacks into the moving express car as the train was pulling out.

As he stood puffing and panting on the platform, one of our neighbours came up and asked what had happened.

"Buggy broke down—had to run for it," my husband gasped.

The neighbour thought a moment, scratched his head, and exclaimed: "But why didn't you unhitch one of the horses and ride here?"

Harry's excitement had been so great that he hadn't thought of that simple solution to his dilemma.

We had known that we had a good sample of wheat. We had been reasonably sure that it would win a high place. But we never dreamed that we would win the first prize and the World's Grand Championship for it.

It was with a real shock of surprise and pleasure that we learned, first over the radio, and then by a continuous stream of congratulatory telegrams and a constant succession of telephone calls, that we had won the top place.

The winning of the World's Championship for hard red spring wheat brought with it but little monetary reward, but it did bring a tremendous amount of valuable publicity and prestige, not only for ourselves and our district but also for Western Canada as a whole, since every time the coveted trophy goes to Canada it is a feather in that country's cap so far as its agricultural reputation is concerned. Actually, we ourselves received the magnificent sum of fifteen dollars in cash for the prize.

The big silver cup, inscribed with the names of former championship winners, and now with our own, passed into our keeping for the period of one year.

Subsequent winners of wheat championships in Canada have been more fortunate, financially, than we were. The honour now carries with it, for instance, certain additional money prizes donated by the Dominion and Provincial Governments, by various Boards of Trade in the big cities of the Provinces to which the honour comes, by the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railways, and by other institutions who directly and indirectly benefit by Canada's winning of the trophy.

Almost immediately following the announcement of our success at Chicago, we began to be literally inundated with letters. (It cost us, as a matter of fact, all and more of the fifteen dollars we won to pay for postage stamps with which to answer them.)

I myself actually replied to over one thousand letters, many of them, in addition to containing conventional messages of congratulation, bearing enquiries upon almost every subject under the sun, from advice as to the choice of a farming location in Canada and the way to raise prize wheat to bequests for loans of money and gifts of cast-off clothing.

There were three letters which I took particular delight in answering. They were proposals of marriage to my good husband from three enterprising young women in the United States. One of them stated that she was willing to come and stay on the farm for a short "pro-

bationary" period—"just so as we can try each other out, you know," while another suggested that she was prepared to marry him even if he happened to be married already, a factor which "didn't matter much," she said, since it was quite easy, nowadays, to dispose of superfluous wives. I don't know whether I was to be murdered or merely divorced. The third announced that she had a "competence" of her own—she was a breeder of dogs in New England—and might be able to contribute something really substantial towards the development and improvement of the farm.

In addition to all this, my husband was approached by all three political parties in Canada—the Liberals, the Conservatives and the Farmers' Party (the U.F.A.) to "stand" for them at the forthcoming Dominion elections. Although they seemed to be hazy as to his actual political inclinations, they at least appeared confident as to his ability to act as their representative.

There was also a great deal of celebrating. We were "dined and wined" at various places all over the Province, and my husband was the guest of honour at so many affairs that he actually began to take on weight.

The Boards of Trade of both Big Valley and Stettler put on the most elaborate banquets. In Stettler my husband was presented with a beautiful gold watch, suitably engraved, with which he has told the time of day ever since; and a little girl presented me with a lovely bouquet of roses which had been brought all the way from Edmonton.

Our own neighbours at Fenn also put on a sumptuous banquet and dance, and showered us with compliments and congratulations, and we were perhaps more touched at this generous expression of their appreciation of our efforts than at anything else, since we felt that in our case the old adage that "a prophet is not without honour save in his own country" was for once not literally true.

Following all this publicity, the Commercial Life Company in Edmonton instituted in Alberta what is considered to be one of the best Seed Competitions in the whole of Canada today. They offered a prize for the best two registered seed crops from any one farm, marks to be awarded for both field inspection and appearance of seed. This was one of the most difficult competitions of all. It carried with it a beautiful silver cup, that had to be won three times in succession (like the Chicago Cup) for the winner to retain permanent ownership of it, and also a gold watch. I might say that we won this competition so many times that not only did we obtain possession of the cup, but we also acquired gold watches for every member of the family and, when all of us were thus supplied, we were given a clock and a silver tea service.

It seemed to us that the Boards of Trade and Commercial Life's interest typified the general interest of merchants and business men in the prosperity and progress of the farmer.

Perhaps most important of all was the honour conferred on my husband at the annual meeting of the Canadian

Seed Growers' Association, under whose direction we were performing our seed work. Harry was elected its National President. In twenty-six years there had only been three presidents, all of them agricultural scientists of nation-wide fame. Harry was the fourth president, and he was the first plain "dirt farmer" to be so honoured.

When Harry returned from the meeting he was literally fired with enthusiasm. He had met, he told us, some of the finest figures in the agricultural world, men of outstanding ability and vision, who felt that there were great things to be done in crop improvement and in bettering the conditions of the farming people throughout Canada. Harry was exceedingly proud to ally himself actively with such high ideals.

"It will mean," he warned me, "a good deal of extra work for both of us after hours." And so it proved to be. A vast amount of correspondence came our way. It meant, of course, that I spent many, many hours at the typewriter, working with him. But I was happy to do it. I was as interested in the work of the Association as Harry was. The idea of ever receiving any reward for such small services as I was able to render never entered my head. What was my amazement, then, when the members kindly presented me, one year, with a gold wrist watch, engraved with my name and the words: "For service to agriculture," and later with a beautiful set of oxidized silver water glasses, complete with pitcher and tray.



Twenty

The years were passing and we had now achieved some measure of success—Harry in his particular ventures and I in mine. For, to my own surprise and satisfaction, I realized that I was at last running my own affairs—the domestic end of the farm—with a greater smoothness than I had ever dreamed possible.

I had come on the farm knowing nothing at all about either cooking or housework. Not only had I learned the actual technique of cooking and housekeeping, but I had unconsciously applied my business experience, my knowledge of office routine, to the problems of my daily life. And this had helped me considerably. Of course, it is always difficult to plan intelligently on a farm, because of the many interruptions and unexpected things that constantly occur, but it is possible, I found out from my own experience, to evolve a workable system that allots to each season, to each day, almost, I might say, to every hour of the day, its own particular tasks.

Meals, of course, were always the major problem. I used to plan them a week ahead, pasting a large sheet of

paper with the menus written on it on my pantry door. This was not always strictly adhered to, but it gave me a good working base. The week's work was also mapped out and posted up, and this I followed, as nearly as possible, with religious exactitude.

On Saturday, for instance, I would bake sufficient food to last over till Monday, always making allowance for the possibility of visitors during the week-end. We always had a succession of visitors on Sunday afternoons. Our farm was a sort of half-way house between Big Valley and Ewing Lake, and people going there would often "stop off" and visit us for a chat and a cup of tea. Friend and stranger alike were always welcome, for consciously, or unconsciously, we had absorbed a goodly measure of that splendid spirit of hospitality which is an outstanding characteristic of Western people. I have often heard Western Canada referred to as a land in which "the pot is always boiling and the door is always on the latch." In those early days of ours this phrase was quite true.

In order to provide for these possible guests, in addition to our own family, I used to stock up with plenty of meat, potatoes, pie, cake and fruit. I would cook a roast sometimes as big as twenty to thirty pounds on Saturday morning. I would peel a pail full of potatoes. I would bake a big batch of bread, two large cakes, numerous cookies, and at least six pies. The house would be given a general clean over, the kitchen well scrubbed, and everything placed in readiness for the morrow. This

meant that Sunday would be as nearly a day of rest as we farm people could ever make it.

On Monday I would follow Saturday's operations on a lighter scale. I had very soon dispensed with the time-honoured custom of making Monday my wash-day, choosing Tuesday instead for that wearisome task. On Monday, then, I would bake sufficient food to last over till Wednesday, thus obviating the necessity for cooking and washing at the same time. Monday night I would sort over the soiled clothing, fill up my tubs, and set the white things to soak.

While the family were eating breakfast, around six o'clock on Tuesday morning, I would set the wash-water, in two large galvanized iron wash-boilers, on the stove to heat. By the time the dishes were cleared away and washed, the separator scoured, the beds made and the floors swept, and the table set for dinner, it would be about nine o'clock, and I would be ready to start on the main business of the day—the washing.

Washing! What a job that always was. Usually it took me the entire day. In summer I washed outside; in winter, down in the basement. The boiling, sudsy water had to be carried in pails from the stove to wherever my tubs were set. More than once I burned myself severely, spilling water on unprotected hands and legs.

I washed for the hired men as well as for my own family. We were always from eight to fifteen strong, according to the time of the year, and since most of the men worked in close contact with the soil, and with

animals, there was always an astonishing pile of extremely dirty clothing—mountains of overalls and socks, heavy underwear and flannel shirts, not to speak of voluminous bed linen.

At the beginning I had washed by hand, rubbing laboriously on a board and earning for myself a frightful backache at the end of each dreaded wash-day. One day, however, Harry brought me an American magazine with an advertisement in it for a portable contraption, consisting of two vacuum cups set on to steel arms, which one clamped to the edge of an ordinary wash-tub and which, when worked with a handle, pressed up and down and round and round on the clothes. I sent away for this and found it a great help. But it still necessitated a lot of elbow grease and was far from performing the work of a regular machine. A picture of me, working this arrangement, was later reproduced in one of our Canadian agricultural journals to illustrate a farm story. Years afterwards I happened to be present at a convention of countrywomen in Winnipeg. I was introduced to one lady, who exclaimed with high disdain: "So you're the Kathleen Strange who *pioneered* with a power washing machine?" She had evidently seen that picture of me and thought that I was blessed with a regular power machine. No use trying to explain to her that I didn't get a real one until shortly before I left the farm and then it was too late to really enjoy it.

Drying the clothes was almost as much of a job as washing them, especially in winter. It often took the best

part of a week, and for many months during the year, when the weather was cold, the various rooms of our house were made uncomfortable and unpleasant with smelly underwear and clumsy flannel shirts which took not hours but days to air thoroughly.

This brings me to Wednesday, which naturally fell into line as ironing, baking and mending day. Except in the busy season, I baked bread twice a week. In the spring, and at harvest time, I baked every other day—ten loaves and a bunch of cinnamon rolls every time. The bread, which at first had been so awful, was now fine and fluffy. I could hardly believe it myself, but I was earning a reputation as a good bread baker. And my pastry and cakes were good, too. I could hold my end up with most—but not all—of the country-born women around. I could almost have cried for the joy of it. I had kept my promise to myself. I *had* stuck to it and I had made good.

Ironing, I discovered, was also a heavy task. Sad irons are rightly named. It soon struck me, however, that a lot of unnecessary time was spent in ironing things that were almost immediately crumpled—towels, sheets, pillow slips, and so forth. I found that if these articles were folded smoothly as soon as they were taken from the line, they looked quite all right, and, in addition, they retained that fresh, alive feeling that sun and air give to things. I did not even iron the men's work shirts. Each lad was allowed one good shirt a week, which I washed and pressed for him. If he over-stepped that limit, I made

him take the garment into town and get it washed there.

Thursday and Friday were the lightest days of the week. The ordinary routine of housework proceeded as usual, of course, but on these days I was able to tackle the sewing, the silver cleaning, and all other extra jobs that from time to time cropped up.

As for the "seasonal" work—this was also planned as carefully as conditions would allow. For instance, in the spring I considered the question of meat supplies for the forthcoming summer months. We did not have any ice and fresh meat was always difficult to keep. So I "put down" as much as I possibly could. Before seeding commenced, I would get the men to kill a pig, or we would purchase a quarter of beef from a neighbour. This I would "can" in glass sealers. We did not care for salt meat, so that very little was ever salted down, excepting the hams and bacon. I had an excellent recipe for canning the beef, and it worked equally well with chicken. I would cut the meat into small pieces, pack it into sealers, season it, but add no water, and then process it for the given time—some three hours or so. When it was cold it congealed into a rich jelly and was as good eaten cold as it was hot. Pork was usually cooked and packed into crocks, then covered with boiling lard. Both these methods permitted me to place a ready-cooked meal on the table at short notice during the summer months—and if I do say so, "as shouldn't," it invariably tasted delicious. I also rendered lard and even tried soap making, but these two jobs were almost more than I could stand.

The sickly odour from the boiling lard hung about the house for days and always made me sick.

Later in the summer, when the vegetables came up, I would can as much of our garden produce as I could conveniently handle. We always had a very large garden, and what we did not eat ourselves during the actual growing season was put away for winter use. Root vegetables were stored in the basement in sand. Cabbages, with which we were usually very successful, were set on shelves in a cool place and were sometimes made into sauerkraut. I seldom canned fruit, however, because it did not seem to me that we saved any money, shipping it in from Ontario or British Columbia at fairly expensive prices, and then going to all the arduous exertion of preparing and processing it, when it could be bought, perfectly canned, at very reasonable case rates from the big stores. Many of my neighbours considered that I was extravagant because of this and they used to say to me: "But the stuff you buy never tastes as good as what you can yourself!" I found this to be incorrect. When people weren't told that it was commercially canned fruit they were eating, they would often congratulate me on the excellence of my home-made dessert.

For the first year or so I had managed without help. But as our activities increased, my own work expanded, until I found that a permanent hired girl was absolutely essential. Usually our hired girls were recruited from the farming families around, families sometimes very much better off than oneself. It always seemed to me that a

hired girl on the farm had a very good time of it. Of course, she worked hard, but she also shared with her employers in their social life and their pleasures. She was treated as an equal and not relegated, as is the case in the city, to the kitchen. One had to remember that one's hired girl of today was more often than not one's neighbour of tomorrow—and sometimes one's daughter-in-law.

I have many pleasant and happy memories of the girls who at one time and another worked for me. From them I learned a good deal about the ways of a maid with a man. I saw many romances bud and blossom, and sometimes come to a happy end. On the other hand, there were some that ended disastrously.

There was one girl whom I will call Mary, who worked for me for quite a number of years. Mary was young, pretty, and efficient into the bargain. And how the boys liked her!

Among her admirers were two in particular. I shall call them Jack and Bill. These two lads used to vie with each other to help dry the dishes for Mary of an evening, and they would carry out the swill pails for her—both acts that were considered to be sure signs of affection.

One night Jack came to my husband and asked if he could draw two dollars. Harry gave it to him, and then Jack explained that he intended to take Mary to Big Valley for an evening's entertainment. It appeared that he had hired his rival, Bill, to drive the democrat for him. Bill would sit in the front seat and attend to the

horses; Mary and Jack would sit in the back and canoodle.

When they returned from town, to our surprise we discovered that Jack was driving. Bill sat in the back seat with Mary.

We learned the story later. It appeared that on the way in to town, Jack, who was a thrifty soul, had been turning over in his mind the prospect of having to spend probably the best part of his two dollars on Mary's entertainment. He began to think of a dozen better ways of spending the money. Better still, he told himself, he could put the money in the bank.

By the time they reached town he had evolved a neat little scheme by which he hoped to let himself out of the situation without further expense. Bill, he knew, liked Mary as much as he did. Why not suggest that he and Bill change places? He himself would drive them home to the farm for nothing.

The suggestion worked. Bill was only too glad to change places, and it is to be suspected that Mary was too, when she discovered Jack's somewhat penurious disposition. A new romance then blossomed out of the ashes of the old. It was not long before the young couple's engagement was announced. They have now been married for several years, have a nice farm home and four bonny bairns, and are doing as well as can be expected considering the ups and downs of the last few years.

Another girl who stands out in my memory was a little Russian girl named Alita Kudras. She was born in

Canada and lived on a farm quite close to our own. Her people, even after twenty years in the West, still spoke no word of English and lived, in their own home, in exactly the same fashion as they had done on the shores of the Black Sea.

I remember what a distrust these people had of our banks. All the money they received, we found, was buried right on the farm.

One day some agents of the Soviet Government, it was said, visited the Kudras farm. They persuaded them to return to Russia—taking with them their Western ideas and their Western implements, all of them to be placed at the disposal of the Soviets.

Alita did not want to go at all. She cried bitterly when her parents insisted that she return with them to Russia. She begged me to keep her, to adopt her if necessary. I would have been willing to do this, for we all liked the child immensely; she was not only a capable girl but a very charming one, too. She was bright and intelligent—a good citizen.

She had to go. For many months after her arrival in Russia I kept receiving the most pitiful letters from her. She wanted desperately to come back. It was quite impossible, at that time, to do anything more for her, and after a bit the letters ceased. I often wondered what had happened to her, how she was faring. Then one day, quite recently, I received a letter with a Drumheller postmark on it. It was from Alita. She is back in Canada—back in Alberta—and thankful to be home.

There was another young woman who was in the habit of making her undergarments out of flour sacks. She would boil the material and make it up into very creditable garments. One day she made herself a pair of bloomers. She was a very big girl, and it took two one-hundred-pound sacks to make such a garment. Evidently the print on the sacks had been particularly difficult to remove, for we saw them on the line, a short time later, merrily blowing in the wind, and on them, for all the world to see, was Robin Hood shooting with his bow, right across the seat.

Once or twice I tried married couples. We invariably found, however, that either the husband was a good worker and his wife was inefficient, or it was the other way round. Hardly ever were we able to get an equally capable pair.

One couple who came to us directly from the Old Country, for instance, stayed only a few months in Canada because the wife "simply couldn't stick it!"

"The man was a fine chap—a hard worker, quick to learn the ways of the West, full of ambition to make good and fired with a love of farm life. His wife absolutely refused to adapt herself, and spent the entire time she was with us bemoaning the fact that she had to do the work of a "servant." She made endless and futile comparisons between the life she had lived in England and the life she was forced to live in Canada. I have often wondered, considering the great fuss she made about it all, whether the difference really was so very great after all. Finally

she induced her husband to take her home. They went back to England—and the dole.

Another couple, on the other hand, remained in Canada because of the wife's splendid courage and character. They, too, came from the Old Country. They had owned a small tobacco business in Manchester, and feeling that there was no future there for their son, had decided to come to Canada. We took all three of them and liked them very much indeed.

Their plan was to work for a year, save all the money they earned, and then look around for a small farm of their own. Unfortunately, the first year they were in Canada was one of poor crops and difficult times for all, and the husband many times became discouraged and wanted to return home. Had it not been for his wife's faith in this new country, they undoubtedly would have done so. But the wife persuaded him to stay and before very long they were successful in landing a job on one of the Government Experimental Farms at a good salary. Their son was able to attend a Western university and only the other day I heard that he had taken a doctor's degree in science.

I had one or two queer people, too. I remember one woman who came to us with her husband—she was an Irishwoman, with a violent temper, who used occasionally, when her "dander was riz," to indulge in free-for-alls with her own man and those of our staff who happened to have annoyed her. More crockery was broken during that period than at any other time on the farm—much

of it against some unfortunate offender's head. But that woman could bake the best apple pies we ever ate.

Another, who came by telephone request from the employment bureau in Edmonton, brought with her two cages of canaries, and a nine-months-old baby. The combined chorus, and the extra work these appendages entailed, soon became altogether too much for us and she finally had to depart.

Another one, upon her arrival, informed me that the doctor had ordered her not to put her hands in hot water, or to go up and down stairs, or to go down on her knees.

She became faint, too, if she stood too long over a hot stove.

"Might I ask what you can do?" I ventured, politely.

"Well, it doesn't hurt me to make beds, if I take my time about it," she replied.

Since that happened to be the particular job I liked doing myself, I felt that she would not suit me. She departed, shortly afterwards, in high dudgeon, and I learned later that she reported me to the employment bureau as being "a regular slave driver!"

Another woman "bossed" me to such an extent that while she was with us I was almost afraid to call my soul my own. She changed the furniture around in every room in the house, altered the positions of the pictures, hung up her own curtains in our living-room and, before I could recover my breath, ordered several new things, which she considered we needed, from the Stettler stores. When one day she calmly annexed my precious

fur coat to wear into town, it was too much for me.

I told her to remove the coat, pack her things and leave the house for good.

"All right," she flounced back at me. "I'll go! But you'll be sorry for it. You'll soon find you can't get along without me."

Strangely enough I managed to, somehow.

Life was pleasant enough on the whole those days. Crops and prices continued to be good. We, as well as our neighbours, launched out in many different directions, putting in improvements and so forth. Some of the farmers around us built new houses and purchased additional land. Many, too, turned in their small cars for bigger and better ones; there were often two and three cars to a family—though we ourselves still didn't have one at all.

One bad thing about all this was, however, that the farming people seemed no longer content with the simple, homey pleasures of the farm itself. They went too frequently to town. One of our neighbours even talked of purchasing an aeroplane, so that he could get back and forth to the city without wasting so much time on the road.

Yes, farm life on the whole was becoming not so very different from city life. In a few years time, people fondly believed, they would all be enjoying the same comforts and conveniences that the city people enjoyed, and then they would be "sitting pretty" indeed.



Twenty-One

In March, 1924, I again expected to become a mother. Harry and I were particularly delighted at the prospect, for I had suffered two disappointments since losing my first baby, and I was beginning to wonder if I should ever successfully be able to carry a child. A specialist assured me, however, that this time, matters having gone safely beyond the dangerous period, I should expect no untoward complications and the birth should be a normal one.

I could not bear to go again to Edmonton, which was still associated in my mind with so much pain and unhappiness, so I decided to go to Calgary. We had made some very good friends there and had been recommended to a splendid physician. I would be well taken care of, both before and after my confinement.

While I was awaiting the baby's arrival, I was invited to attend a meeting of the Calgary Branch of the Canadian Women's Press Club, an organization of newspaper women and free-lance writers. At first I refused, but my friend assured me that no one would concern

themselves with my "condition"; they were all too busy to even notice such things as that.

There were two speakers. One of them stressed the opportunities that were awaiting the new Canadian writer, especially those who had something really interesting to write about, something "different" to say. The other discussed markets.

These talks made a deep impression on me. I had always wanted to write. But so far it had not seemed to me that I had anything particularly interesting to write about.

Suddenly it struck me that I was not only living this life of the West—I was *seeing* it, too. I "had the West in my eyes!" Why should I not try to interpret it to the city people? Also we were engaged in some very worthwhile and interesting work—work that was attracting the attention of a great many people. My husband had already written about his side of it. Why should I not write about mine?

Fired with enthusiasm, I set about drafting out a simple story, on a borrowed typewriter, of our life in the shack during those first few months on the farm. When it was finished I looked through my list of possible markets and chose one that seemed to be an appropriate medium for such material. It was the *Grain Growers' Guide*, now the *Country Guide*, a country magazine that has a very large circulation among Western farmers.

But I soon forgot all about my little story, for that very night, in the small hours of the morning, I awoke

to nature's insistent warning that "my hour was at hand." The date was March 19, 1924. A taxi jolted me across Calgary to the General Hospital. There, some ten hours later, without any complications whatever, my second daughter was successfully born.

Even while I lay in bed, during the pleasant days of my convalescence, I did not think of the article I had so boldly sent out. My thoughts, naturally enough, were engrossed with the new baby and with the miracle that it lived and thrived.

The day before I left the hospital, however, one of the nurses brought me a letter. It was from Miss Amy Roe, woman's editor of the *Country Guide*. To my intense surprise and delight it was an acceptance of my little story and a request for some photographs with which to illustrate it.

Only a "beginning" writer can appreciate just how excited I felt when I saw my very first article actually in print. And what even greater excitement there was when I received my first cheque. I did not frame it, as many a budding author is supposed to have done. I used it to start a bank account for my small daughter, an account which I am happy to say has grown steadily from that day.

Despite the fact that I now had a tiny baby to look after, in addition to the usual routine work of the farmhouse, I continued to write after I returned home. Often it would be ten o'clock at night before I would be free to set on paper the thoughts and impressions that had all

day long been clamouring for expression; sometimes it would actually be in the early hours of the morning, just before the household began to stir for a fresh day; sometimes it would be stolen moments, while the pots were boiling on the stove and I awaited the arrival of the men-folk for their meals. And many times, I confess, I left undone duties that should have been done—and got into serious trouble with my husband on account of it, too. But deny that urge to write I could not.

I managed to sell, during those early writing days, not only to newspapers and magazines all over Canada, but also in England and a few in the United States as well. I even worked up a little syndicate of my own, sending out simultaneous copies of my work to several different newspapers in different parts of the country at once, and thereby considerably increasing the remuneration I received for each of them.

I wrote about anything and every thing connected with prairie life. Of wind and hail, frost and blizzard, the doings of my neighbours, the exploits of our community, the progress of our own work. *All* were copy to me. I tried not to miss anything.

I do not quite know to this day just what my neighbours thought about it all. They never mentioned the subject of my writing to me, though they knew, of course, that I was doing a great deal of it—and often writing about them. At first I made the rather serious mistake of writing too frankly, too tactlessly; sometimes, I am sure, hurting people's feelings, quite without intention,

through my own inexperience of what to leave unsaid.

One day I was amused to overhear the remark:

"You'd better be careful what you do in front of Mrs. Strange. She's likely to put you into a story."

I kept on writing—inspirational essays, feature articles, interviews, short stories—some of them good, some bad, some merely indifferent. But I kept on writing.

For a time I was correspondent for the two local newspapers. The editors of both the *Big Valley News* to the south of us and the *Stettler Independent* to the north, both of which papers had a circulation in our community, had approached me and asked me to write the local news of our district each week for them. The job appealed to me and I accepted with alacrity. I held this job for all the years that we lived on the farm.

When I first took it over, I wondered just how one collected the news items. Those were the days before farmers had cars and one did not get around so very much. I accordingly paid a visit to the previous correspondent, who happened to be the elevator man at Fenn, and asked his advice.

"A little judicious rubbering on the telephone," he said, "will enable you to learn all you need to know of what's going on."

I found I did not need to resort to this somewhat dubious method of collecting news, however, for more often than not the news came to me. My neighbours, indeed, seemed to become much more friendly with me after they learned that I was the local correspondent.

One day I learned the horrid truth. They were afraid I wouldn't put their name in the paper when it should be there, or that I'd put it in when it shouldn't, if they didn't please me. At least, that is what one of them told me afterwards.

Of course, most of my work consisted of the recording of local births, deaths and marriages, public meetings and social affairs. These, however, are the things of which life in the country is mainly made up—indeed, of life anywhere. There is no doubt but that Mrs. Jones, of Prairie Corners, is just as thrilled to see her name in the paper as presiding over some farm women's gathering as is Mrs. Jones, of New York City, whose Park Avenue mansion has been the scene of one of the most elaborate society functions of the season.

There were many humorous incidents connected with this gathering of news. In the spring, for instance, Mr. So and So would phone me to tell me that his was the first wheat to show above ground; it was already so many inches high. Close upon this information would come an indignant call from a neighbour, who had overheard, insisting that his wheat had been the first, and would I be sure to say so in the paper. Somebody's hen had laid her two hundredth egg. Not to be outdone by this, another neighbour would produce one that had laid two hundred and one eggs. Sometimes congratulations would be in order; sometimes condolences. Occasionally I made mistakes. Once, for instance, I married a young couple off a month too soon; once I announced the ar-

rival of a baby that hadn't even been thought of, and another time I sent a farm woman away on a much envied vacation when she was still milking the cows at home and likely to be for some time to come.

Fortunately I was able to include in my notes some items that were of profit as well as of interest to the community in general. We happened to be in a rather advantageous position for accurately recording climatic conditions, as we had on the farm a number of scientific instruments usually only found at experimental stations. We owned, for instance, a recording barometer, an instrument that could usually be relied on to forecast the weather for at least twenty-four hours ahead and that recorded the various fluctuations in it on a weekly chart. We also had several recording thermometers, which were set at strategic positions about the fields, some on high land and some on low land. We thus knew exactly the number of degrees of frost, for example, that had attacked any particular spot. We also had a wind recorder and, what was perhaps the most important instrument of all, a rain gauge. Farmers are notoriously careless when it comes to computing rainfall; in fact, I think most people are. Many a time a neighbour would ring us up, after a good downpour, and say: "Well, that was a fine rain, wasn't it? I measured two inches in a pie pan outside my back door." According to the rain gauge, which measured with unfailing accuracy the exact quantity that had actually fallen, we had perhaps enjoyed less than one



inch. A diary, too, religiously kept day by day throughout the year, recorded not only the routine work of the farm but the data culled from these various instruments and our own experiments with seeds and poultry.

I had discovered at once that there was no remuneration connected with the contributing of correspondence in this fashion. One editor, however, did send me a box of candies every Christmas for several years, though I am sure he could ill afford it. So far as I can see, there is little profit to be made out of running a country newspaper. The amazing thing to me was, and still is, how some of them manage to survive through bad years as well as through good. Their circulation is of necessity restricted to the town and the immediate farming community about it. Advertising can never be very extensive nor very profitable. But survive they do.

It is a fact that to no small extent one can judge a town, and its surrounding farming community, its people, its public spirit, its progress and its prosperity or otherwise, by the kind of newspaper it puts out. I have read many a small-town editorial that was outstandingly fine, showing that the editor had a wide grasp of public sentiment and current thought and ideas. Good local enterprises, such as fairs and exhibitions, are often carried along, and the interest and enthusiasm of the people aroused and maintained, by means of lively comments and editorials in these country newspapers.

The value of land, too, depends in no small measure

on the aggressiveness, or otherwise, of the local country newspaper. Items of interest concerning crops, climatic conditions, and so forth are often copied by the big city dailies, and the district is thus given wide prominence and much good advertising may come to it in this way.



Twenty-Two

By the spring of 1925 conditions on the farm were looking so good that there was talk of a trip back home for me during the coming summer. That year the wonders of Wembley Exhibition were drawing people from all over the world and naturally I felt very elated, not only at the prospect of seeing my parents and friends again, but at the opportunity of taking in this big event. I planned to take my little daughter, Mary, with me and leave the farm domestic affairs in the capable hands of two local girls.

These two sisters were splendid examples of prairie-born girls. They were members of a real pioneer family, for whom I have the highest of respect. Their father and mother, of Dutch and German extraction respectively, had come up from the United States almost forty years before in a covered wagon.

They had found a place on the heavily wooded banks of the Red Deer River, about six miles west of where we ourselves had settled, that was available for homesteading, and there they had started to farm and to build

up a home. The first winter they did not have a house; they lived in the box of their wagon—and it was one of the coldest winters on record. Mrs. de Graff had two little children to care for. To make matters worse, soon after their arrival her husband had a serious accident. He had gone out to attend to a horse that had fallen into a strawpile and could not get up. He managed to pull the horse to its feet, but it fell on him, breaking his leg at the knee. Mrs. de Graff went out and dragged him in, fixed up the leg as best she could, and then rode many miles for a doctor.

All that winter she had to keep things going, for her husband was unable to walk. She had to cut the wood they used for fuel, and to go out into the bush and hunt rabbits and shoot deer for their food, and to do many other things that might have daunted the heart of a strong man.

In the spring she helped her husband to cut logs and build a house. In this house, which with some additions they occupy to this day, all but three of her sixteen children had been born. Of such stuff were the pioneer women of Western Canada made!

People like the de Graffs seem to me to stand out as particularly fine examples of what an average farming family can do to maintain themselves in comparative comfort and happiness under all conditions. In bad years, when cash was short—and it sometimes was even in good years, with a family growing by about one baby per year—they did not run to their friends or to the Government,

asking for help. They just set themselves to cut their coat according to the cloth they had.

There were times when they lived almost entirely within themselves. When they hauled their wheat and oats to town and had it ground into flour and cereals at the local mill; when they looked even more carefully than ever after their cows and pigs and chickens, so that there might be good, staple food. They always had a fine vegetable garden and they saw to it that sufficient was stored away for winter use. They hunted wild berries and canned them in liberal quantities. They even roasted barley and ground it up for coffee—and not bad it tasted, either. So far as I know, the only things they purchased at the store, during those particularly difficult periods, were sugar and tea, and warm clothing and footwear.

When times were good, however, these people spent wisely and well, not indulging in foolish luxuries, but in such common comforts as they felt they had rightfully earned.

On July 1st I was all ready to depart. My trunks were packed, my railway ticket purchased, my steamer reservation made. I was to leave that evening, in a neighbour's car, for Stettler, stay there overnight with a friend, and leave on the early morning train for Calgary and the seaboard.

That night I did not sleep at all. I was terribly excited at the prospect of going to England. Would I find everything the same? Would my family and my friends have

changed during the six years since we had seen each other? Would I be oppressed by the smallness of everything after the broad grandeur of these windswept prairies? Would I long, as a host of well-meaning neighbours had warned me I would long, to be right back in my prairie home the moment I set foot on the old sod? Or would I, on the other hand (and this was a terrifying thought when one had a home and family established on the Western plains) find myself beset with a desire to stay in England and never return to Canada at all?

July 1st, I remember, dawned like any other summer day, except that the morning was intolerably hot and oppressive. The sky was clear but it seemed to glow with a queer, unearthly light. The sun shone out of it like a ball of fire.

As the day progressed, despite the intense and almost overpowering heat, there were moments of strange and unaccountable chill. Everything seemed to be perfectly motionless. Not a leaf stirred; there was no sound of a bird. A strange and ominous silence seemed to reign over all the world.

"Whatever is going to happen?" I asked at one time during the afternoon. A premonition of something awful about to happen seemed to be forcing itself upon us all.

"Look's like a bad storm is coming up," one of the men remarked. "Wouldn't be surprised if it isn't hail."

Hail! Ours was not what is known as a hail district. We had never troubled to take out the insurance that is possible in some parts of the West against this calamity.

If a hail storm should materialize, what damage might it not do? One heard of crops being wiped right out. We prayed that no such calamity might occur to us.

A few more hours passed. It would soon be time for me to start out on my journey. Somehow I had forgotten all about it. With the rest of the family I watched the sky.

About five o'clock a little cloud came up out of the northwest. At first it was hardly bigger than a puff of smoke. But steadily, and with almost incredible rapidity, it increased in size, until suddenly it seemed to rush forward, with a deep roaring sound, and to cover the whole sky. A violent wind, driven by unearthly forces, was unexpectedly upon us and almost instantly every living thing fled for shelter.

I had two brooder houses filled with baby chicks not far from the house. The chicks were all outside, in the little yards prepared for them. Frances and I were just starting across the yard to see if we could not bundle the chicks inside, when an icy blast of wind caught us up and almost hurled us to the ground. A vivid flash of lightning struck across our eyes, thunder rolled reverberatingly overhead, and the rain began to pour down.

It fell in an almost indescribable mass of solid water. The force of it was so great that it took the very breath from one's body. The only possible thing to do was to rush into the house and remain there until it was over.

Watching it, we saw the rain turn suddenly to hail.

Stones as large as sparrows' eggs beat madly upon the roof and crashed against the walls. Pane after pane of window glass was smashed. Through any windows that happened to be open the hail poured in, piling up in great glistening heaps on the floors. Lightning flashed incessantly, the thunder roared deafeningly, and the very foundations of the house seemed to tremble.

Then, as unexpectedly as it had commenced, the hail ceased. First the stones diminished in size, then they turned into rain, and finally the rain stopped falling. Almost miraculously the clouds disappeared from the sky, the sun shone again, and peace descended upon the tortured world.

The whole storm, from beginning to end, could not have lasted more than half an hour by the clock. But in that brief half hour, what devastation had been wrought!

As soon as it seemed safe to venture outside, I went to see what damage had been done. The yard was like a lake, and water lay all over the fields in large patches. Implements had been turned over and the roof was gone from one of the brooder houses. The pump house had gone up like a pack of cards. We found splinters of the walls all over the yard, some of them buried a foot or more deep in the ground. Not a single board remained sufficiently intact to be used again for its rebuilding. The pump itself was wrecked beyond all hope of repair. We had to send post-haste into town for a new one and while we were waiting for it we were almost completely without drinking water. During the twenty-

four hours that elapsed before the new pump was installed we had to haul water from the coulee some distance away. This water was impregnated with all kinds of peculiar minerals and was most unpalatable. The long line of piping, buried a foot deep in the ground, which conveyed the water from the pump to the house, had in some fashion been ripped clean out of the earth, bent like a sapling, and carried several feet off. Some cans of kerosene and gasoline, that had been stored in the pump house, had completely disappeared and we never did see them again. A box of dynamite, that had been there as well, had been hurled into the air and sticks of dynamite were distributed all over the farm. Fortunately, not a single stick had exploded.

I found dozens of baby chicks huddled in the dirt, drowned in a few inches of water. Some of them were crushed in the small aperture into the houses through which they had vainly tried to seek shelter. Oh, how I cried over my poor little chicks. I even brought some of them into the house, and set them close to the kitchen stove in an effort to warm them back to life. Some of them did revive, but they never became healthy birds again. My only consolation was in thinking that most of them must have been killed instantly.

Then I thought of the men. They had been out, away off in the fields, through the entire storm. Were they safe? Had any one been hurt?

I started to walk towards the field in which they had been working. The first thing I came upon was a team



of horses, standing quivering by a fence, trailing some broken harness behind them. They had evidently broken loose from some implement and run away.

Clouds of mosquitoes rose up and surrounded me as I staggered on through the mud and slush, but for once in my life I disregarded them.* My mind was too completely filled with the tragedy that had overtaken our beautiful crop, with the utter ruin that had laid waste all the fields around.

The big wheat field, which but a few hours before had been waist-high with sturdy grain, had completely disappeared. Most of the wheat had been beaten down and buried from sight in the dirt. Here and there, in the more sheltered places, it lay flat and exposed, and steaming in the sun. From it there came an odour as of new-mown hay. But what mockery of new-mown hay! For that fragrance represented, not the glory of maturity but the wantonness of destruction.

I met Harry and the men on the rise of the hill. They were a disconsolate and dejected-looking group—wet to the skin, their faces plastered with mud and grime, their shirts ripped to ribbons on their backs.

"I'm all right," Harry assured me, when I exclaimed at his condition. "I put my water pail on my head and lay down flat on my face."

All the men were a mass of bruises at the back, and their skin, on their hands and faces where it had been exposed, was red and raw from the force of the hail stones beating on it.

"I must go over and look at the big wheat field," Harry said. "That is, what is left of it," he added grimly.

We walked with difficulty across the wrecked field, squelching mud at every step, splashing into deep pools of water and slipping on the slimy, beaten grain.

Yes, everything was gone, wiped out as if it had never been.

"What can we do about it?" I asked despairingly, looking at my husband's tragic face with tears in my own eyes.

"There is nothing to do," Harry said. "We just have to start all over again, I guess. I'm afraid, too, you won't be able to go to England—not this year, at any rate."

"Of course not," I agreed, striving to keep the disappointment out of my voice. For I was bitterly disappointed. I had so looked forward to the trip and now, as on many other occasions, this country had crushed my hopes. I felt that I hated it. Sometimes I had imagined myself being drawn to it, but now it had thrust me away again. It was only by a great effort that I kept the bitter, resentful words that surged to my lips from escaping them.

Of course, I had to think of Harry. His disappointment, his misfortune, was so much greater than my own. Not only was he facing a complete loss of this year's income, but he was also facing the entire loss of four years' work. The careful, painstaking work of seed selection was ruthlessly undone. Right back to the beginning again for him.

There was a long silence between us, and then Harry said: "After all, this is a country of 'next years.' That's what we've got to remember. There's always next year and the promise of what next year will bring forth."

Next year! How sick I got of hearing those words. They are a common expression among all Western farmers. Yet perhaps it is because of it that he is able to carry on. Perhaps it is because of his eternal faith in the morrow that there is any West at all.

As it happened, the particular hail storm of which I write turned out to be more in the nature of a freak than anything else. It took a course clear across our land, hardly touching that of our immediate neighbours, and apparently wearing itself out harmlessly in the hills beyond.

Our actual loss was reckoned by experts to be one hundred per cent. Even if we had been insured, however, and had been able to collect the money, it would have gone but a little way towards compensating us for all the years of work that had been wiped out—a loss that could never be adequately measured in mere dollars and cents.

Of course, I could not go to England, as Harry had said. We were going to have a hard job to carry on at all.



Twenty-Three

I had secretly cherished the hope that I might be able to make my postponed visit to England, in the summer of 1926, but at the beginning of that year I discovered that such aspirations were fated to be still further postponed, for in the forthcoming July I would again be a mother.

This time I decided that I would not go so far away as the city, but that I would put myself in the care of the local doctor at Stettler and go for my confinement to a nursing home there. I planned to go into Stettler by train about two weeks before the anticipated date and stay with a friend. I would just have to walk across the street when my time came.

If we had owned a car, I would have waited at home until the first warning pains came and then have driven to Stettler straight from the farm, as many others now did. But we did not own a car. Despite the fact that I had begged and begged Harry to buy one, and had put all kinds of arguments—that it would save us both time and money and give us great happiness and pleasure—it had all been in vain. He was adamant on the subject.

Harry, in fact, was known to all automobile salesmen throughout the West as being the toughest proposition for a car sale there was. All and sundry had tried their wiles on him, without success. One big automobile company actually sent their star salesman all the way up from the United States to try and break down his famous resistance. This particular salesman, when warned that my husband was a difficult prospect, had made the remark: "Leave the major to me. I'll fix him."

Harry happened to be working in the vegetable garden when this over-confident gentleman arrived on our farm. He looked, as usual, little better than a tramp.

"Go tell the boss I want to see him, my good man," the visitor commanded, as he stepped out of his car.

Harry looked up, touched his cap respectfully, and marched off towards the back door.

A few seconds later he appeared at the front door.

"You wanted to see me?" he asked politely. "I'm Major Strange."

The salesman's self-assurance collapsed like a pricked balloon. He soon recovered his sang-froid, however, and began the high-pressure sales talk which so far had never failed to bring results.

"An important man like yourself," he told my husband, "simply can't afford to be without a car. Just think of the extra money it would make you and the time you would save."

"My friend," Harry countered, "that's just where you're mistaken. I don't need to make any more money. I'm

rich enough already. I'm so rich, in fact, that I'm the only man hereabouts who can afford the time to ride in a buggy."

The salesman eventually gave him up as a "mortification" and finally went away with a sack of seed wheat which my husband had sold to him!

Although we had never yet owned a car of our own, there were always cars in our yard. Sometimes two or three of them. The cars of our hired men. I never knew a hired man yet who didn't yearn for a car. Automobile agents reaped a fine harvest out of hired men by selling them second-hand cars and often took the best part of their wages every month in payment for them. And what the agents didn't take, the repair men grabbed. Maybe you will say that the boys were foolish. But I think there was a good deal to be said on their behalf. Most farms are so far from town, and even when the boss does own a car, it isn't always that he is willing to take his men along with him when he goes out. Besides, when there is a girl in the offing, a car is practically indispensable, as all hired men, I am sure, will bear me out.

Most of the cars that landed on our farm were disreputable-looking derelicts. Yet the amazing thing about those near-wrecks was the fact that they *ran*. At least, they ran one way—there, but seldom back. Those cars evidently believed that their owners needed plenty of exercise.

Lloyd's car, for instance, brought him safely to our farm one day. He stopped outside the back door, asked

for a job, landed it, and then tried to drive his car off to park it in some suitable place. The car refused to budge. It never did move again under its own power. It was finally persuaded to a place of permanent retirement by means of the tractor.

Lloyd left us after a while. But his car remained. Occasionally we would receive a note from him, hoping that the car was all right, and assuring us that he would be over soon "to fix it up and take it away."

For some reason he never did come back. Gradually his car began to disintegrate. The lights, the pump, the horn, the seats, the tires, and various other accessories were "borrowed" at one time and another by fellows working on the farm. Finally the skeleton of the framework was all that remained. This, too, eventually disappeared, no one knew whither, and was never seen or heard of again.

Another lad, Stan, also invested in a car. A Ford model, vintage about 1916. He paid seventy-five dollars for it, I believe, and he paid and paid for ever thereafter for repairs. He had the car in all about two months and during that time he made an average of about one-half of one journey every week. He would leave the yard with a great deal of back firing and get as far as the first gate. There the car would invariably stop dead. After considerable tinkering, and much swearing, it would be induced to start again. We would watch Stan go careering crazily down the hill and hope for the best when he reached the bottom. There was a gate at the bottom and very often the brakes refused to work. On these occasions

Stan would go clean through the gate and have to repair it as well as his car. By strange and devious ways, however, he usually managed to reach his destination. Almost always, though, he had to walk home.

Bill had a girl friend who lived about ten miles from us. So he bought a car to go and see her in. One evening he was visiting her and at ten o'clock her dad came into the parlour and ordered him to go home. Bill said good-night, put on his hat and coat, and went outside. When he was pretty sure that the girl's father had retired, he went back in again. He and his girl continued to sit in the parlour until two o'clock, when Bill decided it really was time to go home.

He got into his car, tried to start it, and found that he didn't have a drop of gasoline. Here was a pretty to-do. The gasoline tank, he found, was padlocked. So he had to get the girl to wake up her father for the key. It was a long time before Bill visited *that* family again.

The cars that were owned, at various times, by the men who worked for us invariably seemed to get stuck in the mud, or turned over into ditches, or froze up their radiators miles from home, or lost pieces along the road, or ran into other vehicles in the darkness. I remember one occasion, when I myself happened to be along, that we had all four wheels stolen off the car while its owner danced blithely in the dance hall above Stirling's Pool Room in Big Valley, so that we had to spend the night there and come home on the train in the morning, much to the consternation of those who had remained at home.

Three weeks before my baby's expected arrival, I happened to be at home on the farm alone. It was a Saturday night and the entire family had gone into town in the car belonging to our prize hired man—Harmon Vernal.

Harmon was a perfect example of the Canadian hired man on the farm, considered by many to be the most intelligent and efficient type of farm worker in the world. He worked for us for so many years that he was just like one of the family and I, at least, always considered him as such.

Dear old Harmon! How every one liked him. Every one will always like him, wherever he goes, for he is one of the most kindly, loyal and generous souls that ever lived. Far from robust physically, and of decidedly delicate build, he possesses an indomitable spirit for hard work and endurance—a spirit that often far exceeded that of stronger men.

I can see him yet, his slight figure perched on the small seat of an eight-foot binder, the lines between his strong fingers and four horses answering to the slightest pull of his efficient hands. When Harmon was on the binder, it seldom stopped, as it so often did in less capable hands. The knottor always tied and the bundles fell straight in the right row. Harmon could cover more ground in one day than any man we ever had. The lad and the horses and the machine, indeed, seemed to be one, working in perfect harmony together.

Harmon's idea was that it was a waste of time to get thoroughly cleaned up every day. He washed his hands,

of course, but for the rest of him he considered once a week was sufficient. It was good clean dirt, he said, the soil! So he would just let it pile on, and the hair grow on his chin, until Saturday came.

On Saturday night, as regular as clockwork, Harmon went into Stettler. There he would get a thorough overhauling. It usually took an hour or more, and many, many waters, and would cost him between two and three dollars in the barber shop. But from these extensive ablutions Harmon emerged as white and sweet as a new-born babe.

If this lad had a fault, it was the fact that he was too good-natured and easy-going. People could talk him into doing almost anything for them, and there is no doubt but that he was often taken advantage of on this account. Although no dancer himself, for instance, he would always take others in to dances. Often he would take one or more girls along as his guests and sometimes would stand treat for a whole party. He seemed to get all the fun he needed out of standing on the sidelines and watching, with a beaming face, while the others danced tirelessly to the end of the evening. He was never in the least bit jealous, even if the young woman for whom he had paid seemed scarcely to notice him at all.

I had just finished washing the supper dishes that night when a very peculiar but very significant pain assailed me. I was a bit startled but not particularly perturbed. After all, the baby's expected advent was still three weeks off yet.

An hour passed and there came another pain. After this one there were more, at frequent intervals, and with all-too-familiar regularity. All at once I realized, beyond any doubt, that the baby was shortly going to be born.

I telephoned the doctor in Stettler. He told me to come into town right away.

"I can't," I said. "There's no one to bring me in."

"If I don't locate your family within an hour, I'll come out to you," he promised, and rang off.

I decided that I must get into town by hook or by crook. I had nothing ready for a confinement at home and it would have terribly inconvenienced the entire household and put every one, including myself, to all kinds of discomfort and bother.

I parked myself at the telephone and rang up one after another of my neighbours. As it was Saturday night, most of them were away from their homes. At any rate, their cars were.

Finally, at about ten-thirty, my eldest step-son arrived home on horseback from visiting a neighbour. I sent him post-haste on his horse to the only neighbour with whom I had been unable to get into touch—Bob Sutfin, who didn't have a telephone.

By this time the sky was becoming overcast and it had started to rain. It takes very little rain, in summertime, to turn the dirt roads of the prairies into veritable morasses of mud. I realized that if it continued I was likely to have a very unpleasant and perhaps a dangerous trip ahead of

me. But I just had to get to Stettler and I was prepared to face anything to achieve that end.

Fortunately Bob Sutfin happened to be at home. But first he had to fix a tire on his car. Another half hour elapsed before he was ready to come and fetch me.

I had been keeping in touch with the doctor all this time. He was very perturbed at my symptoms and had tried to induce me to remain at home. But this I refused to do. The last thing I did before leaving the house was to telephone him that I was on my way.

Oh, the memory of that awful drive. It haunts me yet.

About a couple of miles from our farm we met the family on their way home and I was at once transferred from Bob Sutfin's car to Harmon's. The rest of the family then returned home with Bob, while my husband and I, with Harmon driving, continued on our way to Stettler.

The roads fulfilled my worst expectations. The car slithered from side to side in the mud and three times went clear over the bank into the ditch. Fortunately we did not turn over and each time, by dint of hard exertion in which I was forced to join, we were able to get back on to the road again.

The rain came down in sheets and completely obscured the trail. The windshield wiper refused to work and my husband had to stand on the running board, most of the time, and wipe it with his pocket handkerchief. Then the headlights went out and could not be made to go on again, so we had to drive the last five miles into Stettler in pitch darkness.

How we ever managed to stay on the road at all, I do not know, for most of the time Harmon was literally driving "blind." In one place, we found out afterwards, there was a big hole in the centre of the road which, if we had struck it, would have completely smashed our car to pieces. By a miracle we missed it.

Meanwhile, in the back seat, I was doing my best to be brave. I am no heroine, and I do not bear pain easily, especially when it is not very severe. But when it comes to something really big to be faced or endured, then some inner strength seems to come to my assistance, and I can go through with it with at least an outward calm which often wins me praise I do not deserve. On this occasion I was conscious of Harmon's presence in the front of the car. I would not make a fuss in front of this young man. My husband was along, too, the first time he had ever been with me either before or during a confinement. I suspected he doubted my ability—being a woman—to face suffering manfully. Well, I would show him! I set my teeth and endured.

The rain poured in on me through the tattered side curtains of the shabby old car. Despite the fact that it was midsummer, I was shivering with cold—and fright. Events were progressing with such rapidity that I had actually to fight against the baby being born. Indeed, if we had had any matches with us—which we hadn't—I should have urged them to stop the car and let me have the baby right there on the trail.

Harry kept encouraging me; "Buck up, old girl. Be a good soldier."

Well, I tried to be. Even Harmon congratulated me afterwards on my gameness. "You didn't so much as make a squawk," he said, proudly.

At last we saw the lights of Stettler gleaming ahead. What a welcome sight they were. How I prayed that I could hold out till we reached them!

The old car struggled painfully on, Harmon perspiring at the wheel, my husband urging him on from the back seat. Finally we came into town and pulled up at the door of the hospital, where the matron and nurse were standing on the steps to receive us.

The car stopped dead. That trip was its swan song. It never went again and had to be towed to a garage the next morning and was left there for old junk.

I staggered up the steps and into the hall. But my baby refused to wait any longer to be born. As I mounted the stairs, assisted by the two kindly women, it made its final and complete appearance. By this time, however, I was lost to all consideration of what was happening. For the first time in my life I fainted.

That drive of twenty miles had taken us four hours and twenty minutes. During the most of that time I had been undergoing the final stage of labour—and fighting against it. I pray that I may never have to go through such a fearsome experience again.



Twenty-Four

Nineteen twenty-seven marked the beginning of the bad years. Not only did we suffer a very poor crop that year, and for several succeeding years, owing to drought, excessive moisture that spoiled the colour of the grain, and early fall frosts that shrivelled it, but we also suffered a series of other disasters that added materially to our losses.

Drought is one of the worst climatic disasters that can befall the farmer. He sees his grain come up and start to grow and then, before his very eyes, he sees it slowly wither and perish. Sometimes he even has to plough it under before harvest. We did, that summer of 1927, and it almost broke our hearts to do so.

Ploughing under is done with the purpose of saving what little moisture there may be left in the parched soil, and of having the land in readiness for any rain that may chance to fall before the next spring's seeding. It means, of course, that the crop is completely lost.

It was the first severe drought we had suffered in our district. But severe droughts had occurred in the past,

and might occur again. Why, then, one was prompted to ask, did people stay?

It seems to me that the answer lies in the fact that the Western farmer realizes that, though his soil may be dried of moisture some years, it will always survive. Soil does not die. The rain, when it does come, always recuperates it and enables it again to produce fine crops.

And so, even against this great odd of drought, the farmer hangs on and never quite loses courage. There is an old Chinese poem, from the Shi King Collection of Confucius, which, I think, fits the situation perfectly. It runs as follows:

*"The drought consumes us. There on high
The hills are parched, the streams are dry,
The drought consumes us. Still I strive,
And will not leave while I survive."*

The Western farmer will not leave his farm. His faith and his hope are unconquerable. He believes in next year, and what next year may bring forth.

Later, our farm was almost destroyed by fire. A little company of local farmers were at work on the road that ran by our lower fields. About noon a wind sprang up, and the men, who were eating their lunch by the roadside, decided to build a small fire. The fire was laid in a sheltered dug-out in the gravel bank by the roadside. It was considered to be a perfectly safe place.

From time to time the fire was replenished with armfuls

of dry grass and twigs and sticks. Suddenly, however, one of the bunches of dry grass caught fire in mid-air, and was blown by the wind across the fence into our hay field. Before the men realized what had happened, the grass bordering the fence had become ignited and was burning fiercely.

Even then they did not become greatly concerned. They climbed through the fence and began stamping around in an endeavour to beat the fire out with their feet.

Insidiously, however, the flames gained on them. Within a few minutes the tiny blaze had become a raging inferno, and was sweeping rapidly across field after field of beautiful hay land towards the wheat and stubble fields that lay beyond. In its course lay many fine stacks of hay and some granaries filled with grain.

Leaping and curling, crackling and roaring, the fire raged on. By this time we had seen it from the house, for great clouds of black smoke were rising from the burning fields. Our men rushed out with sacks and barrels of water, and neighbours came from near and far, prepared to stay and fight the fire until it was completely under control and out. Close to the house the tractor ploughed up and down, making a wide "guard" all around our dwelling quarters. Despite this, however, I took my two young children to a piece of ploughed land and remained there until I was sure that it was safe to return to the house.

It was night before the fire was completely conquered. One by one the fighters returned to their homes. There

had even been women among them. Some, however, remained to watch in shifts all night, and our own lads took turns in sitting, at different points of vantage, to watch for some unexpected outbreak. Little globes of light flickered in the bushes all night long, where branches still smouldered. They looked like harmless stars, twinkling there out in the darkened fields, but they were, we knew, far from harmless and might cause a fresh outbreak at any moment.

One afternoon the wind began to blow from the southwest. It had been very hot; suddenly it became cool, then distinctly cold. The sky grew darker and darker, not inky black as when a thunder storm is approaching, but a sort of brownish-yellow, impossible to describe. A low roaring noise became increasingly audible, growing into a great crescendo of sound as the storm came nearer and nearer.

Suddenly it was upon us. Clouds of dirt, good prairie soil, swept past at from fifty to sixty miles an hour. Light implements, small machinery, cans, anything and everything that lay in its path was swept up and hurled along with it. From every side came the sound of smashing and cracking and tearing, but owing to the thick murky darkness that completely shrouded the outer world, it was impossible to see what damage was being done.

Crashes came from within the house as well as from without. A sudden terrific clatter from the direction of the basement sent me scurrying down there. The window of the store-cupboard had blown in and a whole row of

sealers and cans of fruit had gone hurtling in every direction. Fruit and vegetables and meat were all mixed up in a soupy confusion.

Dust came pouring into the house like smoke through cracks in the windows. It filled the rooms with a nauseating fog and laid a thick film of dirt on everything, including ourselves. I happened to be working at my typewriter, in front of the living-room window, when the storm first occurred. One of the lower panes of glass suddenly split through the centre. A great jagged sheet of glass fell forward on to my desk, letting in a blinding cloud of dust, almost choking me and sending papers and books scattering in every direction.

Outside the men were having a terrible time, too. One man was driven into the pig pen for shelter. Another, who was driving a hay rack, was blown down into the coulee and overturned. Others took refuge in near-by buildings.

Fortunately no one was hurt, but almost as much destruction had been done as if it had been hail. The wind, tearing across the fields on its ruthless way, had cut off the tender grain as if with a gigantic knife. The pump house again was completely wrecked. Some implements and small tools were lost, never to be found.

The storm lasted only about fifteen minutes. Gradually the angry sounds died away. The sun came out. Presently the skies were clear again. Only the blackened fields, and my own blackened house, remained to remind us of the uproar that had been.

The fields of young grain looked "sick" for a while. But they came up again. The house got a good spring-cleaning. So the storm may have had some good results, after all.

As if all this were not enough, my husband suffered a severe accident. There had been quite a bit of controversy going on about that time regarding the building of a Municipal Hospital in Stettler. Many of the men were against it. The district was divided into two factions, who disputed lustily. Our own home was divided on the subject. Harry was going around talking and lecturing against the project, while I was all for it. Harry said there was no rhyme or reason to it; it would only end in raising the taxes, and they were high enough already. Most people could be well enough looked after in their own homes, and in any case, when they needed a serious operation or were really ill, they went to the big city hospitals for it.

I argued that it was because so many farm people were not given proper care that they were not as strong in their old age as they should be. Although babies had been, and still were, successfully brought into the world on farmhouse kitchen tables, who knew how many had been lost, and how many mothers had suffered perhaps for years afterwards, because of it?

The hospital people finally won the day, and a very beautiful and finely equipped hospital was built in Stettler.

Very soon after this something happened that made my husband entirely change his tune and rendered him eternally grateful that his side had lost out.

Our well on the farm was one hundred and fifty feet deep. There was a six-inch casing and an inch and a half steel pipe running down into it. On the end of this pipe was a brass cylinder or pump. Occasionally this cylinder would go wrong and have to be hauled up for repairs. We had a permanent rig for this purpose. With block and falls we hauled the whole thing up, effected the repairs, and then let it down again.

There was always the danger of losing the cylinder by it becoming detached, so we used an ingenious device to prevent this. A small chain, called a calf chain, was attached to the cylinder and came up through the six-inch casing alongside the pipe to the top. The other end of the chain was usually fastened to a heavy log, loose in the pump house, so that this end of the chain would not be lost down the well.

One day the cylinder stuck. Up came the piping in fast time. The chain was pulled up with it and lay on the ground, one hundred and fifty feet of it between the cylinder and the log.

They started to put the pipe back down again. Four or five twenty-foot lengths of pipe had been attached to the cylinder and were gradually being lowered. My husband was standing with his right foot on the edge of the six-inch casing, which protruded about an inch over the top of the well floor. Suddenly the block and

falls gave way, and down crashed the lengths of pipe, one hundred and fifty feet deep. The chain, tied to the bottom of the cylinder, swept down after it like a flash of lightning, and the log at the end of it came into the well with the speed of a bullet.

The log caught my husband's leg just above the ankle and simply carried it over the top of the six-inch casing, leaving his foot in his shoe on the other side. It completely broke all the bones.

The hired man who was working with him looked at it and immediately pulled out the sharp knife that all hired men carry in their pockets. He spat some tobacco juice on the blade—to disinfect it, he said afterwards—and bent down over my husband's foot.

"What are you going to do?" Harry yelled at him.

"I'm going to cut your foot off," the man said. "It's no darn good now anyway. I once cut off a man's hand that had got caught in a separator. And a good job I made of it, too."

Harry had difficulty preventing him from performing the operation.

I heard him shouting from the house and went out to see what was the matter. When I took a look at that leg, I almost fainted.

Harry himself did not faint, but he looked ghastly. The leg was in a most awful mess. I have never seen anything quite so sickening before. We all kept our heads, however. In a trice some one's car was at the door, a sort of stretcher had been made up out of boards covered with

blankets, Harry had been laid on it and lifted into the car, and we were off for the Stettler Hospital.

What a trip! We had to travel slowly, as the road was bad with ruts, and every jerk gave the poor man the most agonizing pain. He was soon delirious, raving about the war, urging his men into battle and shouting out commands in a jumble of broken words.

We arrived at last. Within a few minutes he was on the operating table, the terrible smash had been attended to, and he was in a comfortable bed. He was there for several weeks because complications set in that necessitated constant care and attention.

"Now," I said to him one day, "now do you see the benefit of a good hospital, near at hand? You'd most certainly have lost your foot if we had had to go all the way to Calgary—and even if you hadn't lost it, look what it would have cost you."

"I agree with you," Harry said: "Women sometimes see further than men. At any rate, they look at things in a different way. Men see things and argue from reason and logic. Women see things from the heart. I grant that reason can never compete with the heart. You win!"



Twenty-Five

I began to receive very disquieting news from England concerning my mother's health. For months she was extremely ill and finally lay at death's door. My father then sent me a cablegram, urging me to make a special effort to come home and see her. It was a very difficult time for me to make such a trip, but I knew I must go.

Liverpool! I saw it once more through a fine haze of rain. I was beside myself with excitement as we steamed slowly up the Mersey and finally came to rest at the dock.

Harry's uncle, who lived in Liverpool, had promised to meet me at the ship. As I came down the gang-plank towards the landing place, I saw a tall, fine-looking man standing there, smiling up at me. I ran forward in an exuberance of emotion and flung myself into his arms.

"Oh, Uncle Harry, it's so good to be home!" I cried. "I'm so glad to see you again!"

The tall gentleman quietly disengaged himself.

"I'm sorry," he said, in polite but somewhat chilly tones. "I don't know you, madam."

"Aren't you Uncle Harry?" I gasped.

"My name happens to be John Smith," he informed me, but there was the suspicion of a twinkle in his eye. "And I'm quite sure we have never met before."

"I certainly beg your pardon," I said, contritely. I looked around. There was the real Uncle Harry, a few yards away, fairly shaking with laughter.

I was almost overcome with mortification at this embarrassing mistake, but the sequel to it was so funny that I have often thought of it with a chuckle since. On the ship I had made the acquaintance of a nice young man who was returning to England from somewhere in British Columbia. He happened to be just behind me as we came down the gang-plank, although I had not known it at the time, and it was his father, greeting him, and who somewhat resembled Uncle Harry, I had thought was smiling at me. Probably to make me feel a little better the young man wrote to me later, care of Canada House, a little note explaining that his father had himself only recently returned from a trip to Montreal, and had got into terrible hot water over the incident. His wife, who had been standing close by, had taken me for some woman that her husband had met in Canada and perhaps had an affair with—at least, it must have looked like it, judging from the exuberance of my greeting. The gentleman had had some tall explaining to do before the matter had been set right.

I spent only a very short time with Harry's relations at this stage of my trip, as I wanted to get to London as

quickly as possible, and from thence to Westcliffe-on-Sea in Essex, at the mouth of the River Thames, where my dear mother was now living.

How lovely it was to see her again. The reunion between a mother and her only daughter, separated for many years, is something almost too sacred to write about. I had felt guilty so many times at leaving her at all. And yet, a woman has to follow her mate. With Ruth I had said: "Whither thou goest, I will go . . . and where thou lodgest, I will lodge."

My appearance seemed to work a miracle. My mother immediately took a turn for the better and before I left she was completely recovered.

How we talked and talked. I had so much to tell her. Of my husband, and my home, and the grandchildren she had never seen. I had so many questions to ask, too. What had happened to this one and that? How were all my old friends? I wanted to see them all again and try to recapture something of the happy days of my youth.

I went, of course, to see Grandma Strange. Grandma, indeed, did not look a day older than she had done when she had left the farm. Still as charming, as sprightly and as enthusiastic about life as ever. I told her all about the farm; how it had progressed since the day she had gone away. Some of the people she remembered; she wanted to know all about them and sent them messages of friendly recollection. She said she would like to come back with me and I was almost tempted to urge her to come. But I think she is better where she is. After all, the

prairies are essentially a place for the emigration of *young* people. To uproot an older woman, and try to make her adjust herself to their sometimes harsh conditions, is not advisable.

Yes, it was good indeed to be back in England. To see the lovely fields, green even in wintertime, with their neat hedgerows; the narrow country lanes with their great spreading oaks. There were the same rows and rows of red brick houses, with their hundreds and hundreds of chimney pots, so dearly familiar as to bring tears to my eyes every time I looked at them.

It was simply enchanting, too, to hear the soft, English voices after the often somewhat harsh and strident voices of our Canadian and American people. I marvelled at the English girls' complexions—so naturally pink and white. Out on the prairies, alas, as I had learned to my own cost, the dry air soon took all the moisture out of one's skin and ruined one's complexion, so that one eventually had to go in desperation to the drug-store for camouflage and repairs.

Strangely enough, however, I soon found that things were not going altogether as I had expected. I seemed to be suffering from a curious and increasingly "let down" feeling. At first I thought it was because England must have changed since I went away; because my friends had changed. None of my old friends seemed particularly pleased to see me again. Certainly not any of them put themselves out very much on my account. They were not greatly interested in hearing about Canada. It was too

far away, and besides, they were too busy with their own affairs, with the round of their own daily lives and social activities, to bother much about my somewhat "weird" experiences in that strange and distant land from which I had come.

I soon found myself exclaiming at, and even criticizing, things that had been commonplaces to me for a good many years as a young girl.

There was the English climate, for example. I had always taken it for granted before. Now I found myself grumbling all the time about the raw, penetrating cold, the heavy mists, the persistent deluges, the all-enveloping fogs. It would not have been so bad, I said, if the houses were properly heated. But for the most part they were not. Very few of my friends knew the meaning of the words "central heat." They still sat around their little fireplaces, fried in the front and frozen in the back, and thought everything was all right. If I had been a Canadian visitor on a first visit in England in wintertime, I could not have been more unfavourably impressed by this lamentable fact.

I had not remembered, either, what fanatics the English people were for fresh air. Fresh air is fine, at the proper time and in the proper place. But imagine being expected to take a bath with the window open and a raw January wind blowing in from outside. If the window wasn't left a little bit open, you see, the walls might get steamed up, and that would spoil the wall paper! Besides, fresh air was healthful.

I crouched over the tiny fireplaces and shivered and shook. I crawled into bed at night with a hot water bag clutched in my arms, bed socks on my feet, and a woollen shawl about my shoulders. In Canada, I heatedly assured every one, I never slept in anything more substantial than a silk nightie all the year round, and look at me now! I might as well be a hundred years old, the way I had to coddle myself.

Oh, for my nice warm house on the farm. Better to be too hot than too cold. Better to suffer from a trifle lack of fresh air than from a too heavy overdose of it. And forty below zero was preferable at any time, especially when the sun was shining, to this shivery, raw cold that England called winter.

Some of my English friends said to me:

"How glad you must be to be home again in civilization. It must be awful drudgery on a farm."

I began to think about it. Drudgery! That is a word with many connotations. What is drudgery to one person may not be drudgery at all to another. I had plenty of hard work to do on the farm, of course, and multitudinous chores, but I had ceased to think of them in the light of drudgery. For the most part I enjoyed them. Even getting up at five o'clock in the morning, and feeding a large flock of chickens before breakfast, can be a most agreeable and even inspiring task when one gets up to the bluest of blue skies, the clearest of fresh, bracing air, and when one knows and loves the living things one is working with.

"Drudgery," I told some of them; "why, you are enduring the worst kind of drudgery of all." And I pointed out to them how they whirled round and round in the social wheel, afraid to miss anything for fear of being left out of things; tied to this social obligation and that; rushing hither and yon, often without any definite objective, and then, at the end of it all, having little or nothing to show for their exertions.

How far I had grown away, already, from my original conception of city life.

Other disappointments awaited me, too. If there had been one thing I had particularly looked forward to, it had been the chance to see a few good shows. Out in the West, for eight long years, I had been almost entirely deprived of the theatre. Travelling theatrical companies that toured Canada seldom came as far as Calgary or Edmonton, and when they did come, perhaps with a notable star in the leading rôle, they invariably disappointed one by the mediocrity and often actual poorness of their supporting casts. I suppose that the long jumps between Canadian cities, and the consequent heavy travelling expenses involved, were largely responsible for this.

But I seemed to have struck a bad season. That year, except for one or two serious plays, one of them a revival of a play I had seen before I left England, I did not care for what I saw at all. It appeared to me that the English people's taste had sadly deteriorated.

I had also expected to find the big restaurants and night clubs as fascinating as I had found them during the days

of the war, when we had all made merry in an effort to forget the sad, mad things that were going on over in France. But even a lovely formal dinner at the Savoy, and once, for old times' sake, at the little restaurant on the Strand where my husband had proposed to me during an air raid, failed to give me the same warm glow of excitement and stimulation they had done in former years.

I was taken by some Canadian friends to a then-famous night club. Here, I was told, one would rub shoulders with the great and near-great of the worlds of society, stage and screen. At this club, for a sum that would have kept us in food for a whole week on the farm, I and three others partook of a very ordinary meal, listened to a conventional jazz orchestra, watched a few mediocre cabaret turns, and endeavoured to dance on a floor so crowded that one had to move around in a solid jam of half-naked, perspiring bodies. Eyes grew more glazed as the night advanced; voices more strident. Yet this was enjoying yourself—having a good time.

What, I wondered, was the matter with me? What had changed?

Suddenly I realized that it wasn't England that was to blame. England had not changed at all. It never will change. It was I who had changed. I who had grown so far away from her that I must learn her ways all over again. I was disappointed with things, not because they were different but because *I* was different. I had lost my taste for sophisticated city entertainment. I had found an altogether new way of life and I was content.

Of course, I knew that I still loved England. I shall always love it. There is no place like it on earth, quite.

But now I realized that I loved it in a different way. It was like something I had known and loved in the past. My real life, my present interests, and my present love, lay elsewhere.

Many English girls, who come out to Canada, spend their first few years longing to go "home." I think it should somehow be made compulsory to send them home, after a certain definite period, say five years. Invariably it teaches them a much-needed lesson and ensures their future contentment and happiness in the new land which they have chosen. Home is where your roots have gone down, where your family is, where your work is. Once you have realized this, the biggest problem of all is overcome.

I had intended staying in England for about three months. My mother was enjoying my visit. Everything was going along all right on the farm. The children were well and happy. My husband wrote that he was missing me, but he wanted me to stay as long as I liked and thoroughly enjoy myself.

One morning, however, in early March, I happened to be walking with a friend in Hyde Park. All around me were evidences of the coming of spring. Little buds bursting from silken brown sheaths on the trees. Crocuses, white and purple and gold, bordering the flower beds. Children, shepherded by decorous nurse maids, dancing gaily along the neat gravelled paths.

I thought of the crocuses that would soon be peppering the lush prairie-grass fields of my Canadian countryside, and the ache in my heart suddenly become intolerable. I wanted to see my two prairie flowers, Mary and Donald. I could not bear to be parted from them any more.

I told my mother that I must return to Canada. Tearfully I bade her good-bye. Tearfully, but with love and longing and happiness in my heart, I bade good-bye to the shores of old England, and turned my eyes once more to the West—the West that now beckoned me with loving arms of welcome—home!



Twenty-Six

I little dreamed, when I returned so gladly to my home at Fenn, that I had only a little time longer to live there.

As I travelled up from Calgary, I looked out of the train windows at the now familiar countryside, and realized how deeply I loved it all. There were the beautiful fields, sweeping away on every hand, no longer terrifying me by their vastness, but releasing me from that cramped sensation I had felt at the congested conditions in old England. Cattle stood about near the track, gazing at our passing with stolid, bovine curiosity; men waved to us from their work in farm yards, and women waved friendly hands from back doors. This, I felt, was my own environment. This was where I belonged.

When I got off the train at Fenn, I realized, perhaps for the first time, how far we had progressed since I had first arrived there. The changes had been almost imperceptible as we had gone along. I think it took my brief visit to England to really open my eyes to them.

Instead of one elevator down by the track, there were now two—the old Gillespie elevator and a new one,

erected by the Wheat Pool. The Gillespie people had also built a fine little bungalow as a residence for their agent.

Instead of buggies and wagons lined up against the hitching posts as of yore, there were some fine-looking cars and a big, well-loaded truck. Plenty of people were around, and how different they looked from the people who had greeted me ten years ago! These people were dressed as well as their city brothers and sisters of like station in life.

As we drove along the old familiar trail towards home, I noticed how many improvements had been made on my neighbours' farms. They were improvements that had been made, many of them, before I had gone away. But now I seemed to be seeing them for the first time. The houses and barns were in such good repair; there were even one or two new ones. Many farmsteads had fenced-in driveways and well-fenced yards; some now had fine gardens and hedges and trees had been put in.

Here and there a farmer in our district had invested in an electric lighting plant. Almost all of them had one or two cars to a family. They went regularly to town—so regularly, one woman remarked to me a little later, that they no longer had time to stop and "visit" with each other. Practically every one owned a radio, too, so that good music, good lectures and current news were now available to all—if not at first hand, then at least at second hand.

How had this all come about, I asked myself? What had happened?

Well, for one thing, I reflected, most of the farmers in our district, and in many other districts of Alberta, had enjoyed good crops and high prices during the years 1920 to 1929. Here and there, of course, the individual farmer and the individual district had suffered some calamity such as drought or hail or early frost, but on the whole they had done very well indeed. Some, too, had been caught by the speculation fever—lured into it by the high prices for wheat and other grains, and by the rediscovery of oil in the Turner Valley field near Calgary—and had made money from it. Most of this they had, on the whole, spent lavishly. Few had anticipated that a day of reckoning might come. Few had prepared for it.

The day of reckoning was even more imminently upon them than even the wisest dreamed, for we were then on the brink of a calamity so great that many, both farmers and city people alike, have never recovered from it.

Every one remembers the colossal collapse of the New York stock market in the fall of 1929. It had immediate reverberations in Canada. Almost overnight the Canadian markets, along with other markets in different parts of the world, began to decline.

On the heels of the stock market crash, like a great thunder clap, came the collapse of the oil boom in Southern Alberta. A great many people were reduced by this to almost penury. Some farmers I knew of were wiped out in the debacle and lost not only their entire resources but their farms as well.

Following the collapse of the oil boom came the steady

decline in wheat prices, bringing with it decreased incomes and disappointment to all farmers, and the most serious financial difficulties to the Western Wheat Pools, upon which almost half the farmers of the West had built great hopes and anticipations.

The result of these calamities upon the farming people was that most of the boom-tide standards were almost immediately swept away. The rush and tear of pseudo city life, the passion for spending, the clamour for excitement, gradually subsided. Superfluous cars were sold or stored away. Buggies and wagons that long had been rusting in forgotten sheds were brought forth, fixed up and put to use again. Some telephones were taken out, and economies in food and clothing and in general manner of living were instituted. The old-time sociables and concerts, and the dances at which members of the community supplied the music, were revived, and people found, probably much to their own surprise, that very often more real happiness and pleasure was derived from these simple forms of amusement than from the more or less sophisticated fare which the towns had been catering to them while their money lasted.

It seemed that the country people were realizing, too, that the only real prosperity the West had known had been, not in those somewhat hectic years that had just passed, but in the old days before the war—in the so-called pioneering days. Then the wants of the people had been less than their incomes. And they had been content to live well within those incomes. They had, too, been

content to enjoy and appreciate to the full the real pleasures and happinesses afforded them by the farm itself and the farming community. They had travelled a long way from these things, but they were coming back to them. Adversity was bringing them back.

We ourselves had come to the West when the simple life was still more or less in existence. We had seen the sudden rise to synthetic prosperity. We had seen the old form of country life almost disappear and an imitation of city life take its place. Now the pendulum was swinging back again and we were at a more natural and saner level.

The farmers of the Fenn district—and they were good farmers—were perhaps a little luckier than most, though they suffered, of course, to a certain extent with the rest of the rural people. Our district had good soil, good water, brush and tree shelter for animals, and land that was easily worked. The last few years had brought us drought conditions, but over a period of years the average rainfall had always been good. The country was ideal for the mixed farming in which most of the people engaged—it was very different from the straight wheat farming districts we had visited from time to time in the great flat areas farther south where, when the drought came, the farmers had nothing to fall back on. Our farmers had had small crops, and they had been forced to pull in their belts a bit, but on the whole they had not given way to self-pity. If they felt sorry for themselves, they felt far sorrier for the poor folk farther south, and they joined with the people of the cities in sending carloads of vegetables, big parcels

of clothing, books, magazines and other reading matter, and what money they could spare, as gifts to help them out of their immediate difficulties.

We ourselves had been affected, of course, in some degree by all that had happened. We had lost a good deal of money through the poor crops of recent years, and the sudden drop in prices. Fortunately we had stayed free from the speculation fever. We still had our good home, plenty to eat and drink, interesting work to do, congenial friends, and a boundless faith in the future.

During our early years on the farm I had more than once, I confess, secretly hoped and prayed that something might happen to send us one day back to the city to live. Now such a thought never entered my head. When the idea of leaving was actually presented to me, it came as a very great shock indeed.

It was neither drought nor hail, nor any other like calamity, that finally made us leave the farm.

Our return to the city came about in this wise.

The president of a large Western Canadian elevator company had become interested in the work of the Canadian Seed Growers' Association. Besides donating annually generous sums to be used for the furtherance of the educational work of the Association, he had conceived the idea of setting up, within his own company—the Searle Grain Company of Winnipeg—an agricultural research department, whose duty it would be to devise ways and means by which the many elevator agents, and other members of the company throughout the country-

side, could directly help the farmers to improve their crops and so assist them to increase their incomes from their farming operations.

My husband was invited to organize such a department and to take the position as director of it.

It was a particularly attractive proposition to Harry because it offered him an opportunity to carry on work he loved, and for which his particular abilities and experience fitted him, and for which, undoubtedly, there was a very large field. Harry had already engaged in such work in a small way, and so far as his farming operations would permit, for some years past. With the backing of such a large and influential company as the Searle Grain and with the sympathetic support of Mr. Searle himself there would be practically no limit, he felt, to what might be achieved in bettering the lot of the Western farmer.

We talked the matter over very carefully, torn between our longing to stay on the farm and our realization that such an offer promised an enlarged field of useful work for my husband.

For me it was an especially big problem. Just as I have told how if it had been suggested to me, when I first was married, that I would one day go on a farm and like it, I would have considered the mere idea was nonsense, so I now realized that if any one had told me that the day would come when I would like it so much that I would not want to leave, I should have considered that equal nonsense, too.

For I did not want to leave the farm. I did not! I had

grown to love farm life; to love the friends I had made; to respect and like my neighbours. I had shared with them in many of their hopes and disappointments, their joys and sorrows. Among them I had been brought face to face with great happiness and great sadness. I had worked harder than I had ever dreamed I would have to work, but it was good, honest work, and I had learned to enjoy it. With it all I had retained my good health and my good spirits. I was quite content.

Finally, however, the decision was made. We were to leave.

The last few weeks drew swiftly to a close. The day came to depart. On October 1, 1930, almost ten years and three months since the day we had arrived, we turned our back to the west and set our eyes to the east. It was a sad and almost heart-breaking experience for me as I sat in the car with my family and was driven rapidly down the hill from the house, across the golden-stubbed flat, out on to the main road and off towards Fenn. One short brief hill, one quick, sharp turn, and the buildings were lost to view. A lump rose in my throat; the tears stung my eyelids.

The children looked ahead with bright, eager glances. But my own inner glance was turned backward—to the house I could no longer see, to the home that had grown so incredibly dear.

Silently and sadly I bade the farm good-bye.



Twenty-Seven

Back in the city, my ways now lie in pleasant places. I have much to be thankful for—a comfortable home, innumerable friends, and abundant opportunity for rest, recreation and leisure.

Yet, I confess, I am far from feeling settled or satisfied. I am not happy to anything like the extent I was in the country. City life, with its social round—its teas, its clubs, and its inevitable bridge—does not appeal to me as it once did and as it does to so many people. I feel at a loose end. I want to write. I have time to write. But I do not seem to have the inspiration to do so to anything like the extent I did when I was submerged in household and other duties on the farm.

My children are now attending good city schools. They are receiving an excellent general education but they are missing that special part of their education that only the farm can give—the constant, daily contact with living, growing things. On the farm they learned the facts of life in a wholesome innocent fashion; very early they assumed habits of responsibility, and these habits, I am

sure, will stand them in good stead for the rest of their life.

Many of my neighbours have written to me, since I have returned, asking me which I like the best—city life or farm life. They tell me how lucky I am to be living in a city once more. How they wish they were here, too.

Yes, I am lucky in one way. Yet, on the other hand, I wonder if my good friends would be any more satisfied or happy than I am could they, but experience the everyday life of the city as I now see it.

It is true that they would find many of the amenities of life here of which they are deprived on the farm. They would be able to enjoy theatres and good music, libraries and lectures, regular church services and good choirs, comparatively short hours of work and regular wages, and they would have contact with the minds of people in many different vocations of life. They would find, too, that city housewives, however poor, have at their command innumerable servants, who bring them lights, running hot and cold water, clean streets and sidewalks, garbage and sewage disposal, and many other things which the farm women on the prairies have to do laboriously for themselves.

But they would find also that there is a strict and sometimes harsh discipline to city life—that there is a time clock, a whistle, or a bell to be obeyed; and they would find too—and this would no doubt come as a great shock to them—that a feeling would develop of insecurity; the fear of losing one's job; the ever-present possibility of



having one's business suddenly swept away. These, I am beginning to feel, are some of the prices one has to pay for the apparent good things the city has to offer.

In the midst of the difficulties and hardships and long hours on the farm, I did not realize all this. Now, as I come to vision farm life and city life dispassionately and try to compare them, I begin to see that a person who is living one kind of life is seldom able to judge another. The defects are largely hidden. That is why, perhaps, city people often want to go to the country to live and farm people want to come to the city.

Which is the best life, I would not presume to say. It seems to me to be largely a matter of temperament. The kind of life that suits one person admirably may not suit another at all. Many country people are entirely satisfied with the quiet, work-a-day life they lead, while others long for the bustle of the city; many city people feel that without the rush and constant competition of city life they would stagnate and be utterly miserable, while there are others again who spend the best part of their lives trying to save enough money to buy a farm on which to retire.

My own feeling is that, taken altogether, the advantages and disadvantages are about equal with each, but that they are of a different character. Each life is suited to the temperament of certain people. Each person must, and will, choose his own way of life.

My husband is happy and satisfied because he is still engaged in work he loves; work that, after all, is not so very different from that which he did on the farm. He

spends a great deal of his time out in the country among the farmers. He is daily delving into agricultural problems. His hand may not actually be on the plough, but it is not very far from it.

My own life, on the other hand, is almost completely changed. And, most important of all, I am deprived of one particularly vital thing. On the farm I was a *real* partner with my husband, sharing with him in almost every detail of his daily work. Now his work is carried on in a downtown office, with professional help. There is little I can now do to assist him.

I do not know what the future holds for me and my family. Perhaps we shall one day return to the farm. Perhaps I shall become completely adjusted to city life again and find my own niche here. One thing I do know, however, and that is that the country still calls me. I still love its way of life. It is, for me at any rate, the *only real way of life*.